

# MANLY PURSUITS

Writings on the Sporting Images  
of Thomas Eakins



Edited by Ilene Susan Fort



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Los Angeles County Museum of Art

This anthology was published to supplement the exhibition *Manly Pursuits: The Sporting Images of Thomas Eakins*, organized by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and presented July 25–October 17, 2010.

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*For William Preston Harrison and Cecile Bartman,  
two former Chicagoans who became enthusiastic  
Angelenos and patrons of American art, and by doing  
so changed the course of the appreciation of Eakins  
on the West Coast.*

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# DIRECTOR'S FOREWORD

The Los Angeles County Museum of Art is pleased to have presented the first exhibition devoted to the sporting images of Thomas Eakins (1844-1916) and to publish this unprecedented anthology of writings about them. This American master introduced large-scale depictions of sporting competitions into the fine arts, thereby elevating athletes to heroic stature. From the 1870s through the 1890s when he was painting them, the United States was developing into one of the most technologically advanced and wealthy nations. As a result, the rising middle class experienced more leisure time. Americans began pursuing healthful activities, and a new interest in modern sporting events arose. Eakins depicted his friends and the champion sportsmen he admired in scenes that were meticulously drawn, richly colored, and powerfully designed, and in so doing, initiated a new genre in figure painting.

LACMA has a longstanding yet unusual relationship with the art of Eakins. In 1927, only a decade after Eakins's death and the establishment of the museum as the Los Angeles Museum of History, Science and Art, the fledgling institution held its first Eakins exhibition. Consisting of twenty-five works, including seven sporting paintings, the Los Angeles museum was a venue for a touring display organized by the artist's widow. William Preston Harrison, the museum's first important American art donor, bought Eakins's small oil sketch *Wrestlers* out of that exhibition, intending to give it to the museum (it officially entered the collection in 1948). Fast-forward almost seventy-five years to a moment when the American art enthusiast Cecile Bartman offered to donate funds for the purchase of another Eakins painting, the large *Wrestlers*. The generosity of Cecile and her late husband Fred have been long-standing. But this was a remarkable opportunity to unite, after a century, two related paintings. I would like to heartily thank Cecile, her children, and the family foundation for making this rare opportunity a reality. Ilene Susan Fort, the Gail and John Liebes Curator of American Art, determined that such an august donation deserved a celebration, and the idea for the exhibition *Manly Pursuits: The Sporting Images of Thomas Eakins* was born. To further mark the occasion, Dr. Fort determined to publish, in honor of the two donors, this anthology, the first to survey writings about Eakins.

It is through remarkable people such as Mr. Harrison and Mrs. Bartman that great institutions such as ours are built. I would also like to thank the museum's American Art Council and The Mr. and Mrs. Raymond J. Horowitz Foundation for the Arts for realizing the importance of the exhibition and related publication, and for underwriting both. The exhibition was also supported by an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities.

Thanks and congratulations go to Ilene for bringing Eakins to the West Coast once again and for compiling this related publication, *Manly Pursuits: Writings on the Sporting Images of Thomas Eakins*. Dr. Fort, an esteemed scholar in her field and known for innovative exhibitions and publications, has succeeded again. The anthology is not only destined to become a landmark in Eakins literature but will be part of LACMA's new online publishing initiative.

**MICHAEL GOVAN**

*CEO and Wallis Annenberg Director*



# PREFACE

In December 2007 the Los Angeles County Museum of Art acquired *Wrestlers*, Thomas Eakins's last sporting painting. Within a few weeks I began researching it, an aspect of my job that I thoroughly relished as I had been raised in Philadelphia, the birthplace and artistic center of Eakins. I had grown fond of American art as a teenager during many quiet excursions through the galleries of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the largest public repository of the master's work. I was not surprised by the wealth of writings on Eakins; after all, he is now considered one of this country's iconic artists. But I was baffled by the near total absence of references to our new grand Eakins canvas. Going back through the literature, I did learn many things, most of all that Eakins's other sporting images were extensively commented on during his lifetime and afterward in the daily press as well as in periodicals and journals. I soon realized that through these writings and ones on the related nude figure and motion photographs by Eakins and his circle, a person could trace not only Eakins's artistic development but also the critical appreciation (or lack thereof) of his art. In fact, it seemed to me that Eakins literature—the commentary during his lifetime along with the posthumous criticism, laudatory articles, and scholarly analyses—served not only as an excellent introduction to Eakins's life and oeuvre but also to the transformations of American art and culture from the late nineteenth century to the first years of the twenty-first century.

Eakins and the literature on him was certainly a major factor in the emergence of American art, first as a field for collectors during the 1930s and later as an academic discipline during the 1970s. The growing sophistication of the discipline pushed methodological approaches beyond the confines of biography and subject matter, and by the 1980s discussions of Eakins broadened substantially beyond formal analysis and connoisseurship to incorporate a host of theoretical and critical approaches, including those from outside of the field of art history. Such a provocative range of writings could also serve as an excellent demonstration of the development of the field of art writing in the United States. Indeed, such an anthology could introduce and survey related fields of interest for students and the general public alike.

*Manly Pursuits: Writings on the Sporting Images of Thomas Eakins* celebrates the exhibition *Manly Pursuits: The Sporting Images of Thomas*

*Eakins* rather than documents it. I decided that an anthology such as this would be much more useful than another Eakins exhibition catalogue, especially since superb publications on two different types of his sporting pictures—rowing and swimming—already existed. I did not want to duplicate previous efforts. Scholars at the Eakins session of the 2007 American Studies Association conference in Philadelphia called for a moratorium on publishing books and catalogues on Eakins—because of the rapidly increasing addition of new studies to the already immense literature—which confirmed my belief that an anthology was long overdue.

The writings here span from 1871, the date of the first reviews of an Eakins sporting painting, to 2005. The beginning date was logical, but the cut-off of 2005 rather than 2009 or 2010 could be debated. I decided that the publication of Henry Adams's monograph *Eakins Revealed: The Secret Life of An American Artist* was an appropriate terminus, despite the controversy around it. The study recalls the early-twentieth-century quest to learn all about the artist's biography, while the rationale behind Adams's writing of the book, to unearth the darker side of Eakins's personality, could have been conceived only after the re-emergence of long-lost archival material (the Charles Bregler Papers) and a foundation of probing articles employing new analytical methodologies that dissected Eakins's personality and art.

The articles and excerpts selected are arranged chronologically; when a text was later reprinted exactly the same or slightly altered, the earlier version was selected.<sup>1</sup> This enables the reader to learn exactly when certain interpretations and ideological approaches first entered the Eakins literature. Since the earlier writings about Eakins, especially from the era of Lloyd Goodrich, have been documented the most often, emphasis has been placed on later developments, especially those from the 1980s on. All authors are represented by a single text.

The wealth of choices made the task of selection daunting. Not only were writings considered according to type of publication and the attitude and approach of the author but also to represent different types of athletic activities. Unfortunately, excellent texts by many major Eakins scholars as well as individual, penetrating analyses by nonspecialists had to be left out. I take full responsibility for the selection and for any bias or omissions that may appear.

I.S.F., May 2010

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1 Exceptions to this rule are the texts by Michael Fried and Michael Leja.

# INTRODUCTION

## **“A man who did not care to be written about”**

ILENE SUSAN FORT

The biography, art, and professional career of Thomas Eakins have inspired thousands of publications. The only other nineteenth-century American painter to vie in reputation and have a comparable number of written commentaries is Winslow Homer. Such a phenomenon would have been considered impossible during Eakins's lifetime. Yet within a decade and a half of his death, Eakins began to achieve mythic status.

The literature on Eakins is varied and exemplifies the many different aspects of professional art writing in the United States during the past 135 years: reviews of group and solo exhibitions; museum bulletins; catalogue essays and entries; periodical articles on a variety of themes; writings on specific works, iconography, or media; biography; monographs; and passages in survey books. The intended reading audience has also varied, and has included at times the general public, interested art enthusiasts, devoted art connoisseurs and collectors, and academics and other specialists. Consequently, the methodological approach and style of language used in the many texts have differed substantially, from straightforward journalistic prose to scholarly jargon. All told, the Eakins literature demonstrates the growing sophistication of art criticism and analysis in the United States. The writing of history, that is, the recounting of past events, is a construct that reflects not only its subject matter but also the identity and attitudes of its author and the era in which it is written. It is quite malleable, changing with each historian who selects and recounts only the events and ideas that she or he deems crucial. References to Eakins first appeared in the 1870s, only a generation after the birth of professional art writing in this country; then, a half century later,

in the 1930s, Eakins commentary played a major role in the emergence of a specialized field of literature on American art. During the past quarter century, Eakins scholarship has reflected the growing sophistication and globalization of ideas as academic writing incorporated new theoretical approaches. Texts about Eakins have also been a barometer of the growth of both American culture (the state of society and politics in the nation) as well as the literature on it.

Today Eakins is best known as a portrait painter, and his monumental *The Gross Clinic* has surely attracted the most attention. His sporting images, individually and as a group, have also consistently garnered commentary. In scenes of everyday life Eakins focused on the athletic pastimes and spectator sports that became popular in late-nineteenth-century America with the rise in wealth and leisure. Coverage of specific paintings varied substantially over the decades, with a number of factors determining the frequency of published accounts: 1) how often a particular work was exhibited; 2) its quality; 3) its theme; 4) its owner; 5) the degree to which its subject matter accorded with American social and cultural values at the time of an article's writing; and 6) the state of interpretive scholarship of American art. The fame of some of Eakins's sporting paintings has at times rivaled that of *The Gross Clinic*. *The Champion Single Sculls (Max Schmitt in a Single Scull)* is Eakins's best-known rowing image, partly because it was the first of the group but also because it has long been in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. It has become so famous that it is even referenced in pop culture, as in the national bestseller *Mistaken Identity*, a legal thriller set in Philadelphia:

Back at her office, Bennie's [the protagonist] associates yammered away while her tired eyes meandered over a print on the wall of the conference room: *Max Schmitt in a Single Scull*, Thomas Eakins's portrait of the rowing lawyer who was the painter's idol. She found herself looking at Eakins himself, unidentified in his own painting and sculling with effort in the background. Eakins had lived in Bennie's Fairmount neighborhood, only a block from her, and his mother had manic depression most of his life, too.<sup>1</sup>

During his lifetime the literature on Eakins was produced largely in response to public showings of his work in the group exhibitions held annually by art schools and museums in Philadelphia and New York City.<sup>2</sup> Most of the reviews about the artist's sporting oils and watercolors appeared

in the 1870s, the heyday of his rowing, hunting, sailing, and coaching imagery. Eakins's lone sporting canvas of the 1880s, *Swimming*, and the later boxing and wrestling paintings received negligible attention, in part because they were not often exhibited. Eakins's photographs as well as the motion studies were for private use and enjoyment and for teaching and therefore not publicly displayed, nor commented on in the press.

By the time of his death Eakins had exhibited throughout the country and abroad. Although journalism in Philadelphia and New York was professionalizing, Philadelphia's was a different, more conservative art world than New York's. A number of the local writers were friends or acquaintances of Eakins, and, at first, he did receive "favorite son" status. This regional focus on Eakins was typical of most artists who resided outside New York City and who primarily exhibited close to home (Eakins did not show in New York on a consistent basis). However, some New York-based writers repeatedly covered Eakins's art, and these included many of the most significant and progressive, among them Charles H. Caffin, Clarence Cook, and Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer.

Contemporaneous opinion varied. The reviews were largely descriptive and focused mainly on subject matter and formal elements. Eakins was commended for his precise drawing: Philadelphian William Clark praised him as "a conscientious student of Nature." While critics may not have completely understood Eakins's obsession with science and his use of mathematics to create visually accurate scenes, they usually were negative about the way he attempted to depict motion; *A May Morning in the Park* (*The Fairman Rogers Four-in-Hand*) caused the most divisive opinions. In general, all agreed that the artist's palette was too muddy, dark, and generally unpleasant. New York-based critics did recognize his French academic training: this was logical in the case of Earl Shinn, who sometimes wrote as Edward Strahan, since both Shinn and Eakins studied with Jean-Léon Gérôme. The cosmopolitan Van Rensselaer promoted Eakins as a Realist, placing his art alongside that of Léon Bonnat and Jean Béraud and comparing it to Honoré Balzac's "truthfulness" and "naturalism" (ugliness). Eakins's innovative choice of subjects "close to home" and "characteristic of his locale" became one of his major assets, with only a few dissenting views that the sporting images lacked "picturesqueness." Charles De Kay noted his "remarkable originality" in depicting subjects never "attempted before by artists of his training and parts."<sup>3</sup>

Eakins was also included in the early anthologies and histories of American painting that appeared in increasing numbers at the turn of the

twentieth century. The appearance of these books, authored by some of the same writers who admired Eakins in the periodical literature,<sup>4</sup> acknowledged the country's international standing. Eakins was now deemed a little known but (ironically) old master of American art. His entry into what would become the seminal literature on American art history was at best general, often focused on his portraiture; when specific works were mentioned, the sporting images were not.<sup>5</sup>

Shortly before his death in 1916 and thereafter, institutions began to acquire Eakins paintings by purchase and donation. Some of these were announced in the press, and these notices constituted the first short articles on individual works: 1897, *The Cello Player*, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts; 1916, *Pushing for Rail*, Metropolitan Museum of Art; 1925, *Swimming*, Fort Worth Art Association; and 1927, oil sketch for *Wrestlers*, bought by William Preston Harrison for the Los Angeles Museum of History, Science and Art (now the Los Angeles County Museum of Art).<sup>6</sup> The articles were positive and congratulatory in tone, as they were usually written by the curator who oversaw the acquisition.

Themes established during his lifetime have persisted throughout the Eakins literature. Among those most often considered have been: the provincialism of Philadelphia and Eakins, foreign influences, aspects of his realism, the role of science in his art, tradition versus modernism, the role of biography in his art, and his manliness. By the 1880s Eakins's art would be characterized by certain terms that would be repeated, with variations, for decades: "honest," "brutal," "truthful," "direct," "strong," "unsparing realism," "prosaic," "uncompromising"; by the early 1900s there also appeared an emphasis on his workmanship.

In 1917, Eakins was accorded the "canonical" tribute of a memorial exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and another retrospective late that year in his home town, at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts.<sup>7</sup> Newspaper accounts, promoted largely by a small group of artists, among them the progressive Robert Henri and the conservative Bryson Burroughs (who was also the organizing curator of the Eakins memorial exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art) extolled his painting. The critic Henry McBride, a promoter of modernism, wrote two reviews for *The Sun*; although greatly admiring Eakins, he mentioned few specific works and none of the sporting canvases, even though eleven of them were in the New York exhibition.<sup>8</sup>

After the First World War, Eakins emerged as a perfect hero for the United States. A strong nativist current arose among many writers and other intellectuals, like Van Wyck Brooks, who desired to distance the country from Europe and its destructive forces by reviving forgotten American masters, such as Herman Melville, to inspire contemporary artists to tap their “usable past.”<sup>9</sup> During the Gilded Age, when gentility had been extolled in society and Impressionism and the Aesthetic Movement had reigned in painting, Sadakichi Hartmann had viewed Eakins’s dark, sober painting style as masculine, and the artist as a warrior against innocuous, effeminate art.<sup>10</sup> Postwar writers increased the chauvinism, glossing over Eakins’s French training and casting his art and person in terms that they thought identified him as thoroughly American, stressing features like “ruggedness,” “independence,” “individualism,” and the “manly.” *The Arts*, founded in 1920, became a leading crusader, and most of the figures who would promote Eakins as a great American were young writers and artists who worked for the magazine or in some way were associated with its founder, Hamilton Easter Field, and its underwriter, Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney: Forbes Watson, Alan Burroughs, Lloyd Goodrich, and Virgil Barker joined forces to champion artistic freedom and “stand with the American artists against timidity and snobbery.”<sup>11</sup> A rediscovery of Eakins was part of their effort, and several of the first extended articles on the painter appeared under the aegis of *The Arts*.<sup>12</sup>

In 1923, almost three decades after his first solo exhibition (1896), Eakins was resurrected. That year, the Brummer Gallery in New York City accorded Eakins an individual exhibition that inspired three landmark articles.<sup>13</sup> These would emphatically set the stage for the appreciation and study of Eakins as a quintessential American master. Helen Read’s review in the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, the main newspaper of the borough, appeared a month prior to Walter Pach’s essay in *The Freeman*, and probably was read by many more people, as *The Freeman* was a “little magazine” with but small circulation. Although Read thought Eakins did not evince French influence, it was Pach who overwhelmingly promoted Eakins as quintessentially American.<sup>14</sup> Not only did he link Eakins with the greats of U.S. politics and literature, but his own precise writing contributed to the characterization of Eakins as a great American icon. He used such expressions as “earnest work,” “homely truth,” “native,” “force,” “nobility,” “self reliance,” “strength,” and most of all “masculine,” in conjunction with American character, life, and expression. It was Pach who initiated these descriptors that would be used increasingly in the literature, not Lloyd Goodrich, who is usually credited for constructing the American myth of Eakins.

The 1920s also witnessed the first in-depth, multipage articles solely on the artist, as well as the first catalogue of his work.<sup>15</sup> Writers considered not only the art but the personality and even the appearance of Eakins the man. Alan Burroughs devoted one entire essay to Eakins's character, and thereby began the process of recasting certain of his problematic behaviors as exemplary of an American's quest for truth: his dislike of social conventions and the charges of immorality in his teaching methods were explained as his devotion to the study of the nude.<sup>16</sup>

By the time Goodrich assumed the mantle, the course of mythologizing Eakins as the Great American Realist was clearly established. With the stock market crash of 1929 and the ensuing Great Depression, heroes of an independent streak that epitomized Yankee spirit and stamina were surely needed. Within four years, Goodrich published as many essays on Eakins as well as a working catalogue raisonné, and in four different types of publications: a major art magazine, a museum bulletin, an exhibition catalogue, and a book, which was the first monograph on Eakins.<sup>17</sup> All were based extensively on information Susan Eakins shared with Goodrich, and they were appreciative in tone. Goodrich's documentation and attitude set the standard, and Eakins literature would continue for decades to emphasize an American sense of realism, truthfulness, integrity, thoroughness, and scientific accuracy. In 1939, the young Virgil Barker, who would go on to write one of the early historical textbooks on U.S. art (1950), did elevate Eakins's talent beyond mere American literalism and exactitude by declaring that one fundamental element often overlooked in discussions of Eakins had been his "imagination."<sup>18</sup> But even Barker interpreted Eakins's imagination as unifying his scientific interests, visual naturalism, and design sensibility.

Throughout the Eakins literature a delicate binary has prevailed between Eakins the French-trained artist and Eakins the original Yankee. Biographical notes throughout the 1920s still referred to his Parisian training. Duncan Phillips's commentary in the catalogue for the *Tri-Unit Exhibition of Paintings and Sculpture* of early 1928 represented the transitional state of Eakins criticism and the problematics involved. Although the collector-critic mentioned Eakins's training, he went on to insist that "Eakins never suggested the French" even though he ironically concluded, "There is something positively racy, even to us, in his Americanism."<sup>19</sup> In the nineteenth century, writers in the United States had used the word "racy" to refer to the risqué quality of French culture. Goodrich was the most adamant in promoting Eakins's independent Yankee character, but even his comments at times were contradictory. Although he devoted an entire chapter of his 1933 monograph to Eakins's experiences in France and Spain, he concluded his text:



His art was essentially original. . . . His eye was as innocent as that of a primitive, observing things as if they had never been painted before. . . . Few artists have been so little influenced by others, or have shown so few signs of a borrowed style. . . . By the time he reached France his predilections had already crystallized. . . . In the art of his period Eakins stands out as an isolated figure, belonging to no school. . . . In spite of his training in France, as soon as he returned to this country he had begun painting native subjects, in a style entirely his own.<sup>20</sup>

Susan Eakins objected to Goodrich's erasure of the French impact, but her opinion would remain private.<sup>21</sup> Within a short time thereafter, the issue of Eakins's debt to his French teachers would completely disappear from interpretations and would remain absent for several generations.

In 1930 the fledgling Museum of Modern Art held the landmark exhibition *Homer, Ryder, Eakins*, thereby officially elevating Eakins to American Master status and to part of the triumvirate that would dominate American art history for several decades. His art became a weapon in the battle against the invasion of French modernism, in particular, abstraction. Despite the exhibition venue, conservative newspaper critics Royal Cortissoz and Margaret Breuning lauded as traditional American Eakins's qualities of seriousness, workmanship, and integrity above what they deemed to be the moderns' superficiality, carelessness, and egotism.<sup>22</sup>

Eakins continued to exemplify national attributes at times when such patriotic icons were again desperately needed, during the Depression and into World War II. Yet the sporting paintings, which clearly signify strength and ruggedness, remained largely absent from much of the 1930s literature. The year 1944 was the centennial of Eakins's birth, and celebratory exhibitions led to a substantial increase in the quantity and scope of writings. Even the general-audience magazines *Newsweek*, *Life*, and *Time* devoted feature articles to Eakins. *Life* presented ten color reproductions, several of them sporting canvases, showing activities that demonstrated the comfortable, democratic way of life Americans were fighting to uphold.<sup>23</sup> As part of the continuing nostalgia in the 1930s and 1940s for "the good old days," Eakins paintings "helped to create a social and political imaginary that was," as described by David Lubin in 2002, "congruent with the one emanating from popular Hollywood films of the war years, such as the 1944 Technicolor musical *Meet Me in St. Louis*."<sup>24</sup>

Framing the centennial events were two very different monographs.<sup>25</sup> Museum director Roland McKinney wrote his 1942 text as part of an “American Artists series.” As such, his approach was similar to that of Goodrich’s 1933 monograph, primarily biographical, promoting the artist as the father of the American Scene. McKinney devoted several extended passages to Eakins’s love of sports and sporting images, so it is not surprising to learn that at one time he owned Eakins’s *The Artist and His Father Hunting Reed-Birds on the Cohansey Marshes*. With information supplied by sports-writer and Eakins friend Clarence W. Cranmer, McKinney discussed the late boxing images in more depth than had previous accounts.<sup>26</sup>

The other monograph (the third on Eakins), published privately in 1946 by Margaret McHenry, was the first full-length biography. It is written in a very chatty style with numerous details (some incorrect) not mentioned in previous accounts. Difficult to wade through because of many asides concerning specific personalities, it is a worthwhile read, if just for its humorous anecdotes.<sup>27</sup> McHenry also featured the boxing paintings, no doubt because her source, Samuel Murray, was the student of Eakins who introduced him to prizefighting.

In the mid-1940s the Eakins myth was enhanced by new factual information and broader interpretations. Another student of Eakins, Charles Bregler, wrote the first modern article on his motion photography, thereby introducing a medium not previously identified with the artist.<sup>28</sup> Bregler’s account of Eakins’s construction of a special camera apparatus and how it differed from that of Eadweard Muybridge was soon supplemented by A. Hyatt Mayor’s essay on the photographs of Eakins and Edgar Degas. Curator of prints at the Metropolitan Museum, Mayor considered Eakins’s photographic oeuvre comparable to that of the French Post-Impressionist.<sup>29</sup>

Clement Greenberg and James Johnson Sweeney further complicated Eakins’s persona as the quintessential American traditionalist. Two leading promoters of Abstract Expressionism, they both considered Eakins according to modernist criteria. Greenberg explained his use of chiaroscuro, color, and psychology to posit Eakins as more than a literal naturalist. Perhaps the first modernist writer since McBride to link Eakins back to French art of the 1860s, Greenberg thought Eakins reacted to Courbet in a manner comparable to Cézanne.<sup>30</sup>

During the decades following World War II, the field of American art history was transformed from a collector and museum based discipline into an academic one. Colleges began to incorporate American art history into their curricula, and the first dissertations in the field appeared. By the 1960s,

specialists went beyond connoisseurship and Morellian analysis to explore ideological issues, such as “what is American in American art?” Not a new question, it now became of primary importance. With the international rise of Abstract Expressionism, contemporary art was deemed outside humanistic concerns and issues of quality, so the study of art in the United States was consequently divided into two chronological fields, historical (before 1940) and modern/contemporary (after the war). Eakins became more significant within this new abbreviated history. The facts of Eakins’s life and art were researched as never before by academic scholars.

The English professor Sylvan Schendler wrote the first book-length critical text on Eakins, published in 1967, based on his intellectual appreciation of individual paintings within the specific context of the Philadelphian milieu. Many paintings little discussed heretofore, including most of the major sporting canvases, were sensitively considered. The year 1969 witnessed two seminal publications that provided alternative perspectives and for the first time documented their commentary with extensive footnotes. A book by Barbara Novak explored the basic traditions of American art through a series of chapters devoted to key nineteenth-century exponents, including Eakins, while Gerald Ackerman devoted a lengthy article to Eakins’s relationship to his French teachers. Curiously, both Novak and Ackerman referenced Eakins in Paris. An historian of American art, Novak noted that when Eakins visited the 1867 Universal Exposition he was more fascinated by the machinery than the art, and she placed him within a genealogy of American indigenous realism rooted in the early limner tradition and encouraged by a mid-nineteenth-century Luminist interest in specifics of time and weather. Focusing largely on rowing and hunting imagery, Novak updated 1920s nationalist sentiments with a discussion of Eakins’s use of the camera. Ackerman, a historian of French art, located the source of Eakins’s fact-oriented realism in another arena, in his academic studies with Gérôme and Bonnat, realizing the rowing paintings were contemporary versions of Gérôme’s river scenes on the Nile. Not surprisingly, Ackerman’s article was published in a French journal rather than a U.S. publication; it would take more than a decade before professors of American art history would enthusiastically follow Ackerman’s lead.

More attention began to be paid the photographs at this time. In a 1963 article, William Innes Homer and John Talbot were the first academics to discuss the relationship of Eakins to Muybridge.<sup>31</sup> Gordon Hendricks authored the first major publications on Eakins’s exploration of this medium—a 1969 exhibition catalogue and a 1972 book—but they were

primarily illustrative, with the limited text allocated to identifying and dating the images.<sup>32</sup> Not until after the appearance and sale of a corpus of forgotten photographs through Olympia Galleries in Philadelphia (1976, 1977, and 1981) did the literature on this medium proliferate and the subject attract serious scholarship. The different types—the Naked series versus the motion studies—and their place in Eakins’s methodology were probed.<sup>33</sup>

The approach of the American Bicentennial encouraged a flood of publications on American art, and the Eakins literature reflected this trend. Donelson F. Hoopes’s 1971 picture book on Eakins’s watercolors and Hendricks’s 1972 volume on the photographs documented little-known aspects of Eakins’s oeuvre (many of the watercolors were sporting images). Hermann Warner Williams’s 1973 landmark survey book on American genre painting concluded with an extensive discussion of both Eakins and Homer, asserting that nineteenth-century genre painting reached its pinnacle with these two masters.<sup>34</sup> Conservator Theodor Siegl presented a precise, analytical, and mathematical approach in his catalogue entries on the rowing perspective drawings included in the Bicentennial exhibition catalogue *Philadelphia: Three Centuries of American Art*, thereby setting a high standard for future catalogue entries.<sup>35</sup> The first scholarly catalogues on Eakins collections quickly followed, issued by the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden and the Philadelphia Museum of Art in 1977 and 1978, respectively.<sup>36</sup>

Several noteworthy publications appeared in 1979 and demonstrated a continuing expansion of approaches. The Eakins boxing paintings were the subject of the first extended scholarly article on a single type of athletics;<sup>37</sup> its appearance in an American studies journal rather than an art magazine demonstrated how scholars from various humanities and social sciences contextualized Eakins in a broader cultural arena. Linda Nochlin, a historian of French art, continued the thread begun by Mayor and Ackerman, returning Eakins to international art circles when she included him in her book *Realism*.<sup>38</sup> Nochlin’s commentary was brief. However, a special issue of *Arts* was devoted entirely to Eakins in May of that year. It featured thirteen articles written by known and emerging scholars in the field, among them Goodrich, John Wilmerding, Elizabeth Johns, and Ellwood C. Parry III.<sup>39</sup> The contributors considered such topics as the little-known 1896 Earles’ Galleries exhibition of Eakins portraits, individual works such as *The Crucifixion*, his teaching, late portraits, and individual museums’ Eakins collections. The issue was an excellent indicator of the rise in the quality of Eakins scholarship.

The long-awaited monumental book by the dean of Eakins studies marked the culmination of the Eakins myth.<sup>40</sup> Goodrich’s work of fifty years, published in two volumes in 1982, referred to as “magisterial” by one Eakins

scholar,<sup>41</sup> was primarily a life study. Although he did incorporate some of the new ideas and interpretations that others had presented since the appearance of his 1933 monograph, Goodrich retained his original approach and attitude, even though, as Elizabeth Johns pointed out, the known data did not always confirm his interpretations.<sup>42</sup> Extended discussions, entailing formal analysis of individual paintings, amplified on some of the lesser-known sporting paintings such as *Wrestlers*. The study was important for the many references and lengthy excerpts from the long-lost Eakins manuscripts that Goodrich had had access to while Susan Eakins was still alive. However, the reappearance in 1984 of the original manuscripts (now known as the Charles Bregler Papers) and their subsequent purchase and publication by the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts<sup>43</sup> robbed Goodrich's study of this distinction. Indeed, revelations that the Bregler Papers offered and subsequent interpretations based heavily on them would lead to the most radical transformation of Eakins's reputation since 1920 writers established him as a great American hero.

In 1979 Johns called for "a reassessment" of Eakins within multiple artistic traditions rather than continuing to place him within the single "conventionally acknowledged special position in American art."<sup>44</sup> She herself was the first to answer, in 1983, with a clearly written, insightful book about Eakins as a heroic delineator of modern life.<sup>45</sup> Devoting a chapter to the rowing paintings, she presented the history of the sport, and by doing so prioritized the social dimension of the imagery over its formal character. A landmark study, *Thomas Eakins: The Heroism of Modern Life* encouraged new interpretations.

The documentation of the Bregler collection of Eakins photographs in a comprehensive 1994 publication by Susan Danly and Cheryl Leibold, with essays by various Eakins and photography scholars, enabled sustained attention to this medium. Eakins's known photographic oeuvre had been greatly expanded and would be crucial for future analyses of Eakins's interest in anatomy and movement, which formed the foundation of so many of his sporting images. Beginning in the late 1980s, the photographs would also serve as the foundation for many of the gender studies on the artist, as a core group of them revealed many previously unknown private moments of Eakins, his family, friends, and students.

Until this time, American art was discussed largely in traditional terms, through biographical accounts and iconographic and formal analyses of objects. Even Johns, for all her contextualization, could be considered an extension of American cultural studies. But the 1980s writings on Eakins by Michael Fried, David Lubin, and Bryan Wolf evidence a new type of art

history arising largely in response to European semiotics, structuralism, post-structuralism, deconstruction, and critical theory. Interpretations of art became more theoretical than historical. Historians of American art at last abandoned their provincial stance, of focusing on a unique native character of American art or in examining it entirely within the discipline of art history. Concepts from other intellectual fields, in particular literary theory, psychoanalysis, and the social and pure sciences, were not only incorporated but often determined the authors' methodologies.

The close reading of a work of art in terms of structure and content was still encouraged, but for a purpose other than the appreciation of a beautiful work of art. Paintings were no longer value-free documents but multivalent "texts" to be "read" within multiple social and cultural contexts. Fried expanded the accepted territory of Eakins investigation in his study of *The Gross Clinic*, presenting a Freudian analysis heavily indebted to Jacques Derrida that delved into Eakins's relationship to his father, fear of homosexuality and castration, and an obsessive need to be professionally successful. Such historians, through their writings and teaching (all are university academics), determined the course of much future Eakins scholarship. Lubin has noted that the "distinctly anti-positivist and non-affirmational view of Eakins" that he and Fried proffered seemed especially appealing in the post-Cold War era, with its "heightened distrust of science and technology as solution to world disorder."<sup>46</sup>

Much of mainstream Eakins scholarship—as demonstrated by William I. Homer's thoughtful 1992 biography, the large retrospective exhibition catalogues of 1993 and 2001, and Kathleen Foster's 1997 meticulous and insightful study of the art in the Bregler collection<sup>47</sup>—avoided these new deconstructivist approaches or minimized their findings, preferring to maintain the positivist view of their canonized artist. Rather, the radical interpretations appeared at first as academic journal articles. Encouraged by the sexual revolution and increasing liberalization of American society, historians during the 1990s peeled away layers of the Eakins myth, often through psychoanalytical readings of imagery, to reveal not a model of virtue but a psychologically confused person. The sporting paintings—in particular the rowing canvases, *Swimming*, and related photographic studies of nudes—were crucial to the deconstruction of Eakins's hagiography and thus played a crucial role in recent scholarship on Eakins and identity issues, in particular regarding his sexual orientation and attitude toward race. An entire exhibition was devoted to his rowing images in 1996, and the accompanying catalogue included both traditional and new interpretations.<sup>48</sup> In his exploration of how Eakins used the sculling images to respond to and react against

Victorian cultural expectations of manhood, Martin Berger followed the cultural discourse of masculinity. He explained,

Rather than imagining Eakins's canvases as rarefied, high art objects . . . I understand them as participants in a cultural *discourse* of masculinity. I invoke the term "discourse," borrowed from the work of Michel Foucault, as an organizing set of beliefs and social practices. . . . Because discourses constitute a *process* of cultural formation, I take them to embody the agency of both artists and audiences as well as the constraints imposed by language and other social structures.<sup>49</sup>

Numerous others also applied revisionist methodologies to examine Eakins's identity: Jennifer Doyle, Randall Griffin, Michael Hatt, Norma Lifton, Marcia Pointon, and Kathleen Spies.<sup>50</sup>

Paintings nearly absent in the literature were considered anew.<sup>51</sup> This was especially the case with *Swimming*, whose erasure had no doubt been due to issues of nudity and homosexuality. Practically ignored for decades (except for Pach's 1923 admiration of its "character of that America of the builders"), the painting was mentioned in 1941 in F. O. Matthiessen's landmark book about American culture in the time of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Walt Whitman.<sup>52</sup> Despite the Whitman association, mention of Eakins's sexuality or the sexual element in his art remained minimal or oblique for decades.<sup>53</sup> Perhaps the homophobic fervor of the Cold War era discouraged attention; Matthiessen, an openly gay and left-wing academic, had been hounded during the McCarthy era and called before the House UnAmerican Activities Committee because of his sexual and political orientation. The coinciding of the Gay Rights Movement and the discovery of Eakins's nude photographs around the same time, the 1970s, encouraged reconsideration of such issues.<sup>54</sup> Yet even Henry Rule skirted the problem in his outstanding 1974 comparative study of the poet's and painter's commonalities, such as their shared love of the commonplace and belief that the human body, unclothed and unidealized, was the perfect subject.<sup>55</sup>

Not until the late 1980s was Eakins adopted by the gay community unconditionally and the painting referenced in publications that would quickly become classics in queer studies.<sup>56</sup> The letters in the Bregler Papers, which cast new light on intimate details of Eakins's personal life and issues, provided documentary support for the studies that began appearing in the 1990s. *Swimming* came out of the closet at that time in three publications.

Allen Ellenzweig brought the related photographs into homosexual studies, and the British scholar Michael Hatt explained the cultural context of various related terms, including homosexuality and homosocial, in nineteenth-century United States.<sup>57</sup> It was Whitney Davis's 1994 article that was the most controversial, and it has become a landmark in Eakins studies. Relying heavily on Freudian interpretations with considerable references to Whitman, Davis considered the related photographs and painting *Swimming* to demonstrate how Eakins's repression of wholly "heterosexual discharge[s]" resulted in a painting referencing the Civil War and the fantasy of acceptable homoeroticism.<sup>58</sup> The considerable fund-raising effort of the Amon Carter Museum to purchase the painting from its neighbor the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth no doubt returned the painting to the public attention. After the museum organized an entire exhibition and catalogue around it in 1996, *Swimming*, the related nude photographs and the issue of homosexuality became part of the Eakins literature.<sup>59</sup>

The new art history also dramatically transformed a theme that previously appeared only occasionally. African Americans appear in several of Eakins's paintings, including hunting scenes, which as early as 1875 attracted the attention of a Belgian critic (writing in France) who characterized his art as "exotic" (equating black + non-European = exotic), a typical nineteenth-century orientalist formula. But American critics were silent on the topic. The Civil Rights Movement—and global transformations as nations that had once been imperial powers dealt with their former colonial populations—inspired a number of major publications on the image of blacks in nineteenth-century American art. Leading scholars of European and American art—Ellwood Parry, Hugh Honour, and Albert Boime—included Eakins in their substantial studies.<sup>60</sup> Placing Eakins within American Reconstruction society, they usually aligned him along with Homer and Eastman Johnson as sympathetic portrayals of blacks, but noted his retention of slave tropes. Sidney Kaplan's earlier catalogue essay (1964) remained the most extensive treatment of the theme in Eakins's work until Alan Braddock's of 1998.<sup>61</sup> In semiotic terms, Braddock questioned the validity of the concept of realism, noting that Eakins's so-called sympathetic attitude was neither part of the "discourse of sentimentalism [n]or that of Jim Crow" but more ambivalent. He then located Eakins's imagery within the larger ethnic studies of the early modern scientific age, and by doing so expanded the discussion of race to include the role of anthropology, a new science then emerging in both the United States and abroad.



Braddock, along with Berger and other young scholars eventually published their ideas in monographs. But they had first presented their interpretations and conclusions in doctoral dissertations and academic journals. Theses and dissertations on Eakins had begun appearing in the 1970s and focused on his teaching; in the 1980s different aspects of Eakins's career and oeuvre were explored; and by the turn-of-the twenty-first century they had proliferated to cover a variety of topics and methodologies.

Although the new art history was responsible for these and other fascinating investigations of Eakins's art, it had its critics. By 1988, the intense self-consciousness of the more theoretical approaches had been attacked for the "autobiographical and aggressive presence of the author with his insistent use of 'I,' the eschewal of causal relationships, and the seemingly free flights of open-ended, but not necessarily historically verifiable, speculation."<sup>62</sup> The controversies were further fueled by the style of writing, dense and with its own vocabulary that often obfuscated the author's thesis and meaning. Much of the Eakins scholarship was no longer written for the art enthusiast but directed to fellow academics, many of them with backgrounds in literature rather than the fine arts.

*Eakins Revealed* (2005), a provocative investigation of the artist and his oeuvre, serves as an excellent summary of the deconstructionist era. It could not have been written without the Bregler Papers, as in it Henry Adams tells "the secret life of an American artist." Analyzing specific works of art, including many of the sporting paintings, the author considered earlier interpretations<sup>63</sup> but enlarged on them by utilizing the multiple lenses of psychological theories and current medical information about mental illness. Hoping ultimately to determine how critics could extol Eakins as a heroic and moral figure while his paintings appear "brutal and unpleasant,"<sup>64</sup> Adams completely destroyed the notion of Eakins as a paragon of integrity—although the cult of Eakins continues. His conclusions are controversial and bluntly stated, not delicately couched as in other investigations, such as Sarah Burns's article of that same year, and consequently they were harshly criticized.<sup>65</sup> By combining biography within a larger contextual framework and by using controversial methodologies, Adams brought Eakins scholarship full circle, from the descriptive discussions of the paintings by contemporaneous critics through the biographical stories of the mid-twentieth century to the personal psychological readings of recent decades. He did so while writing in clear language without scholarly jargon, thereby making the new Eakins accessible to all.

This essay's title is based on a statement by Susan Macdowell Eakins to Lloyd Goodrich, c. 1932–33: "I wonder about the amount of writing about a man who did not care to be written about," quoted by Goodrich in his "... About a man who did not care to be written about": Portraits in Friendship of Thomas Eakins," *Arts* 53 (May 1979): 98.

- 1 Lisa Scottoline, *Mistaken Identity* (New York: HarperCollins, 1999), 368.
- 2 This differs from the literature on Winslow Homer, who additionally was the subject of extended articles on his career and activities. Mention of Eakins's activities typically was brief, usually appearing in the local newspapers of Philadelphia, and often pertaining to his teaching or one of his scandals. The one exception was William C. Brownell's discussion of Eakins's teaching methodology: "The Art Schools of Philadelphia," *Scribner's Monthly* 18 (September 1879): 737–50.
- 3 William Clark, "The Fine Arts: The Spring Exhibition at the Academy—Second Notice," *Daily Evening Telegraph* (Philadelphia), April 6, 1881, 5 (see excerpt in this anthology). Van Rensselaer used the terms "truthful" and "naturalistic" rather than "truthfulness" and "naturalism": Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer, "Picture Exhibitions in Philadelphia II," *American Architect and Building News* 10 (December 31, 1881): 11. On the lack of picturesqueness see, for example, the anonymous "Art Notes," *The American* 12 (September 25, 1886): 365. Charles De Kay, "Movements in American Painting: The Clark Collection in New York," *Magazine of Art* 10 (1887): 39 (see excerpt in this anthology).
- 4 S. G. W. [Samuel Greene Wheeler] Benjamin, *Art in America: A Critical and Historical Sketch* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1880); Charles Caffin, *The Story of American Painting: The Evolution of Painting in America from Colonial Times to the Present* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes, 1907); and Sadakichi Hartmann, *A History of American Art*, 2 vols. (Boston: L. C. Page, 1902), new rev. ed. (Boston: L. C. Page, 1932), rev. as one volume (New York: Tudor, 1934), reprint (Charleston, SC: BiblioLife, 2010). Samuel Isham also mentioned Eakins in his 1905 *The History of American Painting*, a book that would go through revisions and several editions and reprints and which would serve as the standard history book in the field for fifty years.
- 5 Not even in the 1920s, when Catherine Beach Ely in *The Modern Tendency in American Painting* accorded individual attention to artists he influenced—Robert Henri and George Luks, for example—did Eakins rate separate coverage. It would be decades after Goodrich issued his first monograph on the artist before major survey books on American painting presented Eakins's accomplishments in an extended text.
- 6 Sadakichi Hartmann, one of Eakins's most enthusiastic writer-supporters, and owner of the study for *Salutat*, which was a gift from the artist (now Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh), wrote the first article of this type, on *The Cello Player*: Sidney Allan [pseud.], "Masterpieces of American Portraiture," *Bulletin of Photography* 17 (August 4, 1915): 141–43; B. B. [Bryson Burroughs], "Recent Accessions: A Picture by Thomas Eakins," *Bulletin of the Metropolitan Museum of Art* 11 (June 1916): 132; "Recent Acquisitions—Art Department," *LA Museum Graphics* 1 suppl. (November–December 1927): 231. The acquisition of *Swimming* was not announced, but three years later it was discussed and illustrated in the museum's collection catalogue, *Catalogue of Paintings in the Permanent Collection* (Fort Worth: Fort Worth Museum of Art, 1928), 26.
- 7 *Loan Exhibition of the Works of Thomas Eakins*, introduction by Bryson Burroughs (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1917); and *Memorial Exhibition of the Works of the Late Thomas Eakins*, introduction by Gilbert Sunderland Parker (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, 1917). Royal Cortissoz noted that such a tribute was comparable to the ones given Homer and Albert Pinkham Ryder. Cortissoz, "The Memorable American Painters: The Works of Homer, Ryder, and Eakins," *New York Herald Tribune*, May 18, 1930, sec. 8, 7.

- 8 The papers relating to the 1917 memorial exhibition in the Archives of the Metropolitan Museum of Art are very revealing concerning the behind-the-scenes, instrumental roles played by various people, especially artists. McBride, "News and Comments in the World of Art: Thomas Eakins I," and "News and Comments in the World of Art: Thomas Eakins II," both in *The Sun* (New York), November 4 and 11, 1917, and reprinted in *The Flow of Art: Essays and Criticisms of Henry McBride*, selected and with an introduction by Daniel Catton Rich (New York: Atheneum, 1975): 130-39.
- 9 Van Wyck Brooks, "On Creating a Usable Past," *Dial* 64 (April 1918): 337.
- 10 Hartmann, *A History of American Art* (1901) 1934 rev. ed., 203.
- 11 Forbes Watson, "Editorial," *The Arts* 3 (January 1923): 1, quoted by Lloyd Goodrich in "The Arts' Magazine: 1920-31," *American Art Journal* 5 (May 1973): 80. Helen Read may have also known Field, as they both wrote for *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*. Alan Burroughs was the son of Bryson Burroughs, a friend of Field. Goodrich had first met Field around 1916, and attended his summer school in Ogunquit, Maine.
- 12 For example, Alan Burroughs's three articles: "Thomas Eakins," *The Arts* 3 (March 1923): 185-89; "Thomas Eakins, The Man," *The Arts* 4 (December 1923): 302-23 (see excerpt in this anthology); and "Catalogue of Works by Thomas Eakins (1848-1916)," *The Arts* 5 (June 1924): 328-33.
- 13 *Thomas Eakins*, Brummer Galleries, New York, 1923. Burroughs, "Thomas Eakins"; Helen Appleton Read, "Eakins Comes into His Own," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, March 11, 1923, sec. B, 2; and Walter Pach, "Painting: A Grand Provincial," *The Freeman* 7 (April 11, 1923): 112-14, reprinted in *The Freeman Book* (New York: B. W. Huebsch, 1924), 256-61 (see excerpt in this anthology).
- 14 Pach, "Painting: A Grand Provincial." Founded by Helen Swift Neilson, with editorial board including B. W. Huebsch, Van Wyck Brooks, Suzanne La Follette, Helen McLeod, and others. *The Freeman* was published for four years, 1920-24.
- 15 For example, Alan Burroughs's articles in *The Arts*; and Frank Jewett Mather Jr., "Thomas Eakins's Art in Retrospect," *International Studio* 95 (January 1930): 44-49, reprinted as chapter 10 in his *Estimates in Art, Series II: Sixteen Essays on American Painters of the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1931), 201-31. (In his anthology Mather's article is given the date 1929.)
- 16 Burroughs, "Thomas Eakins, The Man," 302-3. Eakins's character and appearance had been considered during his lifetime, but usually mentioned only in passing, as did Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer.
- 17 Lloyd Goodrich, "New York Exhibitions," *The Arts* 8 (December 1925): 345-47; "Thomas Eakins, Realist," *The Arts* 16 (October 1929): 72-83, of which an abbreviated version was reprinted as "Thomas Eakins, Realist," *Bulletin of the Pennsylvania Museum* 25 (March 1930): 8-17; "Thomas Eakins," in *Sixth Loan Exhibition: Winslow Homer, Albert P. Ryder, Thomas Eakins* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1930), 16-20 (see reprint in this anthology); and *Thomas Eakins, His Life and Work* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1933). Goodrich's 1933 monograph included a catalogue raisonné.
- 18 Virgil Barker, "Imagination in Thomas Eakins," *Parnassus* 11 (November 1939): 8-10. Royal Cortissoz did not agree, in "Two Groups of Works by Thomas Eakins," *New York Herald Tribune*, November 12, 1939, sec. 6, 8.
- 19 Duncan Phillips, "American Old Masters," in *A Bulletin of the Phillips Collection Containing Catalogue and Notes of Interpretation Relating to A Tri-Unit Exhibition of Paintings & Sculpture* (Washington, D.C.: Phillips Memorial Gallery, 1928), 29.

- 20 Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins, His Life and Work*, 143, 150, and 154.
- 21 Susan Eakins to George Barker, July 9, 1936 (Bregler Papers, PAFA, quoted in *Writing about Eakins* [see note 43 below], 308): "Mr. Goodrich published a most useful volume on Eakins, but how much he may have profited by his research I cannot say, when a man cannot understand the greatness of Gérôme I cannot think he understands Eakins (Goodrich never knew Eakins—Charles Bregler a student of Eakins & good painter knew & loved him and his work—and his notes on Eakins is really the best writing)."
- 22 Royal Cortissoz, "The Memorable American Painters: The Works of Homer, Ryder, and Eakins," *New York Herald Tribune*, May 18, 1930, sec. 8, 7; and Margaret Breuning, "Modern Museum of Art at Last Holds its Exhibition of American Masters," *New York Evening Post*, May 17, 1930, sec. M, 4.
- 23 "Outlaw in an Undershirt," *Newsweek* (April 17, 1944): 99–100; "Thomas Eakins: Philadelphians Who Snubbed Him Now Honor Him as an American Old Master," *Life* (May 15, 1944): 72–77; and "Arts: A Force," *Time* (June 1944): 44, 46.
- 24 David Lubin, "Review: Projecting an Image, The Contested Cultural Identity of Thomas Eakins," *Art Bulletin* 84 (September 2002): 514.
- 25 Roland McKinney, *Thomas Eakins*, American Artists series (New York: Crown, 1942); and Margaret McHenry, *Thomas Eakins Who Painted* (Oreland, PA: privately printed, 1946). McKinney was formerly director of the Baltimore Museum of Art, where he held an Eakins retrospective in 1936, and at the time of writing his Eakins book he was director of the Los Angeles Museum.
- 26 McKinney, *Thomas Eakins*, 18.
- 27 For instance, McHenry (*Thomas Eakins Who Painted*, 119), explained that in 1900 when the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts decided to show *Between Rounds*, after rejecting it years before, Eakins attended the exhibition reception wearing red bicycle pants and riding a high bicycle.
- 28 Charles Bregler, "Photos by Eakins: How the Famous Painter Anticipated the Modern Movie Camera," *Magazine of Art* 36 (January 1943): 28 (see reprint in this anthology).
- 29 A. Hyatt Mayor, "Photographs by Eakins and Degas," *Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, n.s. 3 (Summer 1944): 1–7.
- 30 Clement Greenberg, "Review of Two Exhibitions of Thomas Eakins," *The Nation* (July 1, 1944); reprinted with substantial changes in his *Art and Culture: Critical Essays* (1961; Boston: Beacon Press: 1989), 177–80; reprinted in *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism, Vol. 1: Perceptions and Judgments, 1939–1944*, ed. John O'Brian (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 220–23. (Copyright issues prevented inclusion of a reprint in this anthology).
- 31 William Innes Homer and John Talbot, "Eakins, Muybridge, and the Motion Process," *Art Quarterly* (Summer 1963): 194–216.
- 32 *Thomas Eakins: His Photographic Works*, text by Gordon Hendricks (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, 1969); and Hendricks, *The Photographs of Thomas Eakins* (New York: Grossman, 1972).
- 33 W. I. Homer and Ellwood C. Parry III were the scholars most devoted to investigating Eakins's photographic oeuvre early on. For example, Homer, *Eakins at Avondale and Thomas Eakins, A Personal Collection* (Chadds Ford, PA: University of Delaware for Brandywine River Museum, 1980); and *Photographer Thomas Eakins*, introduction by Ellwood C. Parry III (Philadelphia: Olympia Galleries, 1981).

- 34 Hermann Warner Williams, *Mirror to the American Past: A Survey of American Genre Painting, 1750–1900* (New York: New York Graphic Society, 1973). (Copyright issues prevented reprinting an excerpt in this anthology.)
- 35 Theodor Siegl, "Catalogue entries 336a,b and 337," in *Philadelphia: Three Centuries of American Art, Bicentennial Exhibition* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1976), 391–94 (see reprint in this anthology).
- 36 Phyllis D. Rosenzweig, *The Thomas Eakins Collection of the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1977); and Theodor Siegl, *The Thomas Eakins Collection*, Handbooks in American Art, No. 1 (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1978). The Hirshhorn Museum Eakins collection catalogue was accompanied by an exhibition of the works, while Siegl's publication appeared a year after curator of American art Darrel Sewell reinstalled the PMA's Eakins holdings.
- 37 Carl S. Smith, "The Boxing Paintings of Thomas Eakins," *Prospects: An Annual of American Cultural Studies* 4 (1979), 402–18 (see reprint in this anthology).
- 38 Linda Nochlin, *Realism* (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1971).
- 39 *Arts* 53 (May 1979): 96–160.
- 40 Lloyd Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins*, 2 vols., Ailsa Mellon Bruce Studies in American Art (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press for the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 1982). The two-volume book did not include the expanded catalogue raisonné that was originally planned; in fact, it was never realized.
- 41 Lubin, "Review: Projecting an Image," 516.
- 42 Elizabeth Johns, "Book Review: Lloyd Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins*," *Art Bulletin* 65 (December 1983): 704.
- 43 Kathleen A. Foster and Cheryl Leibold, *Writing about Eakins: The Manuscripts in Charles Bregler's Thomas Eakins Collection* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press for the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, 1989); Susan Danly and Cheryl Leibold, *Eakins and the Photograph: Works by Thomas Eakins and His Circle in the Collection of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press for the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, 1994); and Kathleen A. Foster, *Thomas Eakins Rediscovered: Charles Bregler's Thomas Eakins Collection at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press for the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, 1997). (See excerpt from the last in this anthology.)
- 44 Elizabeth Johns, "Thomas Eakins: A Case for Reassessment," *Arts Magazine* 53 (May 1979): 130–33.
- 45 Elizabeth Johns, *Thomas Eakins: The Heroism of Modern Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983) (see excerpt in this anthology).
- 46 David M. Lubin, "Modern Psychological Selfhood in the Art of Thomas Eakins," in *Inventing the Psychological: Toward a Cultural History of Emotional Life in America*, ed. Joel Pfister and Nancy Schnog (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997), 159–60.
- 47 William Innes Homer, *Thomas Eakins: His Life and Art* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1992); *Thomas Eakins*, ed. John Wilmerding (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press for the National Portrait Gallery, London, 1993); Darrel Sewell, Kathleen Foster, et al., *Thomas Eakins* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2001); and Foster, *Thomas Eakins Rediscovered* (1997).

- 48 Helen A. Cooper et al., *Thomas Eakins, The Rowing Pictures* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Art Gallery; Yale University Press, 1996) (see excerpts of texts by Christina Currie and Amy Werbel in this anthology).
- 49 Martin A. Berger, *Man Made: Thomas Eakins and the Construction of Gilded Age Manhood* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), 1.
- 50 Jennifer Doyle, "Sex, Scandal, and Thomas Eakins' *The Gross Clinic*," *Representations*, no. 68 (Fall 1999): 1–33; Randall C. Griffin, "Thomas Eakins' Construction of the Male Body, or 'Men get to know each other across the space of time,'" *Oxford Art Journal* 18 (1995): 70–79; Michael Hatt, "Muscles, Morals, Mind: The Male Body in Thomas Eakins's *Salutat*," in *The Body Imaged: The Human Form and Visual Culture since the Renaissance*, ed. Kathleen Adler and Marcia Pointon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 57–69; Norma Lifton, "Thomas Eakins and S. Weir Mitchell: Images and Cures in the Late Nineteenth Century," *Psychoanalytical Perspectives on Art* 2 (1987): 247–74; Marcia Pointon, "Psychoanalysis and Art History: Freud, Fried, and Eakins," in her *Naked Authority: The Body in Western Painting 1830–1908* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 35–58; and Kathleen Spies, "Figuring the Neurasthenic: Thomas Eakins, Nervous Illness, and Gender in Victorian America," *Nineteenth Century Studies* 12 (1998): 84–109.
- 51 Surprisingly, despite its nearly nude male bodies and its two large versions, *Wrestlers* (Philadelphia Museum of Art; and Los Angeles County Museum of Art) received minimal attention. This absence from the literature was only rectified after the final version was acquired by LACMA in 2007. Since then one news article and three scholarly essays have appeared: Ilene Susan Fort, "Eakins's *Wrestlers* as Symbolic Self-Portraiture," *American Art* (SAAM) 23 (Fall 2009): 90–97; Bruce Robertson, "Thomas Eakins's *Wrestlers* and the Practice of Art," *American Art* (SAAM) 23 (Fall 2009): 82–90; Avis Berman, "Wrestling with the *Wrestlers*," *ARTnews* 109 (April 2010): 64 and 66; and Ilene Susan Fort, "Whither the *Wrestlers*," *American Quarterly* 62 (June 2010): 395–402.
- 52 F. O. Matthiessen, *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* (London: Oxford University Press, 1941), 610 (see excerpt in this anthology). Sadakichi Hartmann had dedicated his 1895 book *Conversations with Walt Whitman* to Eakins "as an admirer of Walt Whitman."
- 53 For example, Lincoln Kirstein, "Walt Whitman and Thomas Eakins: A Poet's and a Painter's Camera Eye," *Aperture* 16 (1972): unpaginated.
- 54 From 1969 to 1974, the Gay Rights Movement gained momentum. Energized by the 1969 Stonewall Inn Riots in New York City, numerous organizations were formed and spearheaded community action as evidenced by the beginning of Gay Pride parades. By 1974 activist attention resulted in the first significant cultural change as the American Psychiatric Association deleted homosexuality as a mental illness from their *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. It is therefore not surprising to see a response in the Eakins literature.
- 55 The year 1974, when the medical definition of homosexuality was altered (see note 54 above), witnessed four publications that began to question this aspect of Eakins's art: Hendricks, *The Life and Work of Thomas Eakins* (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1974); Donelson F. Hoopes, *American Narrative Painting* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1974); William H. Gerdtz, *The Great American Nude* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1974); and Henry B. Rule, "Walt Whitman and Thomas Eakins: Variations on Some Common Themes," *Texas Quarterly* 17 (Winter 1974): 7–57 (see excerpt in this anthology). Rule may have had trouble publishing his article as it appeared in a regional publication.
- 56 For example, Emmanuel Cooper, *The Sexual Perspective: Homosexuality and Art in the Last 100 Years in the West* (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986); and Guy Hocquenghem, *Homosexual Desire* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993).

- 57 Allen Ellenzweig, *The Homoerotic Photograph: Male Images from Durieu/Delacroix to Mapplethorpe* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992) (see excerpt in this anthology); and Michael Hatt, "The Male Body in Another Frame: Thomas Eakins's *The Swimming Hole* as a Homoerotic Image," *Journal of Philosophy and the Visual Arts*, 1993, 9–21 (see excerpt in this anthology).
- 58 Whitney Davis, "Erotic Revision in Thomas Eakins's Narratives of Male Nudity," *Art History: Journal of the Association of Art Historians* 17 (September 1994): 301–41 (see excerpt in this anthology). Davis is planning to include in a forthcoming volume of his writings a revised version of this essay, taking into account responses to his original article as well as new information and interpretations that have come to light since its first appearance (e-mail to the museum's permissions department, April 12, 2010).
- 59 Doreen Bolger and Sarah Cash, eds., *Thomas Eakins and the Swimming Picture* (Fort Worth: Amon Carter Museum, 1996). Among the topics considered were the painting's commission and reception, the setting and the models' identities, the Whitman association, its relationship to French vanguard painting, and its restoration. (See excerpt of Richard Brettell's essay in this anthology.)
- 60 Ellwood Parry, *The Image of the Indian and the Black Man in American Art, 1590–1900* (New York: George Braziller, 1974); Hugh Honour, *The Image of the Black in Western Art, Vol. 4: From the American Revolution to World War I* (Houston: Menil Foundation, distributed by Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1976); and Albert Boime, *The Art of Exclusion: Representing Blacks in the Nineteenth Century* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1990).
- 61 Sidney Kaplan, *The Portrayal of the Negro in American Painting* (Brunswick, ME: Bowdoin College Museum of Art, 1964), reprinted as "The Negro in the Art of Homer and Eakins," *Massachusetts Review* 7 (Winter 1966): 105–20; and Alan C. Braddock, "Eakins, Race, and Ethnographic Ambivalence," *Winterthur Portfolio* 33 (Summer–Autumn 1998): 135–61. (See excerpts of both articles in this anthology.)
- 62 Wanda M. Corn, "Coming of Age: Historical Scholarship in American Art," *Art Bulletin* 70 (June 1988): 201. For example, Allan Wallach, "Book Review: Michael Fried, *Realism, Writing, Disfiguration: On Thomas Eakins and Stephen Crane*," *Art Journal* (CAA) 48 (Spring 1989): 95–99.
- 63 Henry Adams, *Eakins Revealed: The Secret Life of an American Artist* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005) (see excerpts in this anthology).
- 64 Adams's description, xiii.
- 65 Sarah Burns, "Ordering the Artist's Body: Thomas Eakins's Acts of Self-Portrayal," *American Art* 19 (Spring 2005): 82–107. Historians were astonished by Adams's attack on Lloyd Goodrich, until then the idolized father of Eakins studies. In response to what he deemed Adams's "curiously . . . rigid use of psychological investigation," rather than following the "discipline's need to be supple," Sidney D. Kirkpatrick published the following year a more standard biography, *The Revenge of Thomas Eakins*, Henry McBride Series in Modernism and Modernity (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), quotes on 9.

## NOTE TO THE READER

Editorial consistency has been introduced for variant names (Biglin, Gérôme, Vélasquez) and the use of “s” in possessives (as in Eakins’s). Punctuation has been standardized to current U.S. conventions, and titles of works of visual art have generally been put in *italic* type.

All original illustration references have been deleted from the texts.

In excerpts and abridgments, endnotes were renumbered to be continuous within the selection reprinted, and necessary interpolations were made to fill out short citations in the original.

Variant titles for some of Eakins’s works have been given over the decades. For sporting and related pictures the current standard title is provided in brackets in reprinted texts (but not in their endnotes). A full list of variant titles appears on page 471.



# LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

- 40    *The Champion Single Sculls (Max Schmitt in a Single Scull)*, 1871
- 41    *Perspective Drawing for “The Pair-Oared Shell,”* 1872
- 42    *Perspective Drawing for “The Pair-Oared Shell,”* 1872  
*The Pair-Oared Shell*, 1872
- 43    *The Biglin Brothers Turning the Stake*, 1873  
*John Biglin in a Single Scull*, c. 1873
- 44    *Perspective Drawing for “The Biglin Brothers Racing,”* 1873  
*The Biglin Brothers Racing*, 1873
- 45    *Whistling for Plover*, 1874  
*Rail Shooting on the Delaware (Will Schuster and the Black Man)*, 1876
- 46    *Sailboats on the New Jersey Shore*, c. 1881  
*Starting Out After Rail*, 1874
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- 50    *Thomas Eakins and John Laurie Wallace at the Shore*, c. 1883  
*Photograph of Rock Thrower (Back View)*, 1883  
*Males Nudes in a Seated Tug-of-War*, 1884
- 51    *Swimming (The Swimming Hole)*, 1884–85  
*Study for “The Swimming Hole,”* 1884
- 52    *Male Clothed, Standing, and Male Nude Named J. Laurie Wallace Nude, Reclining on Platform in Wooded Landscape*, c. 1883  
*Eakins’s Students at the Site of “The Swimming Hole,”* 1883  
*Male Figures at the Site of “Swimming,”* 1884
- 53    *Between Rounds*, 1898–99
- 54    *Salutat*, 1898
- 55    *Wrestlers*, 1899

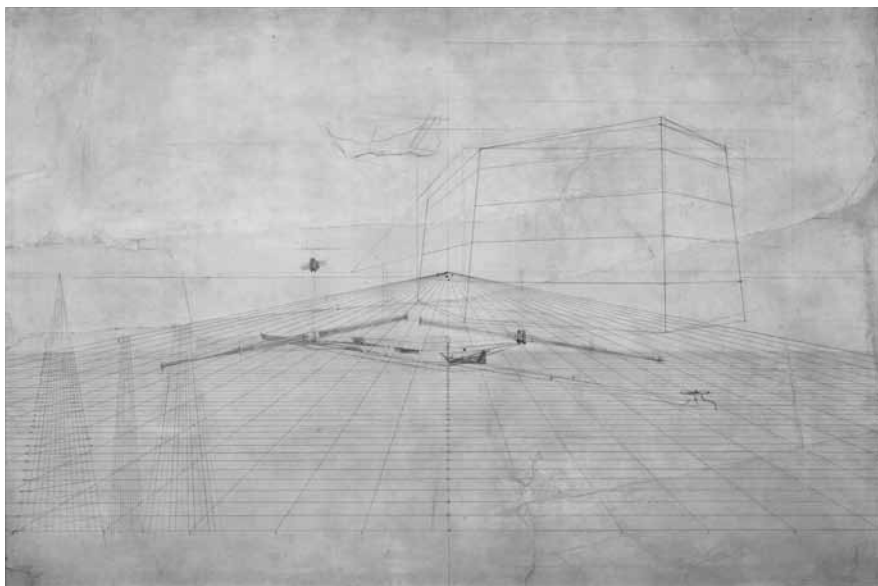


*The Champion Single Sculls (Max Schmitt in a Single Scull)*, 1871

Oil on canvas

32¼ x 46¼ in. (81.92 x 117.48 cm)

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, The Alfred N. Punnett Endowment Fund and George D. Pratt Gift (34.92); image copyright © Metropolitan Museum of Art / Art Resource, NY



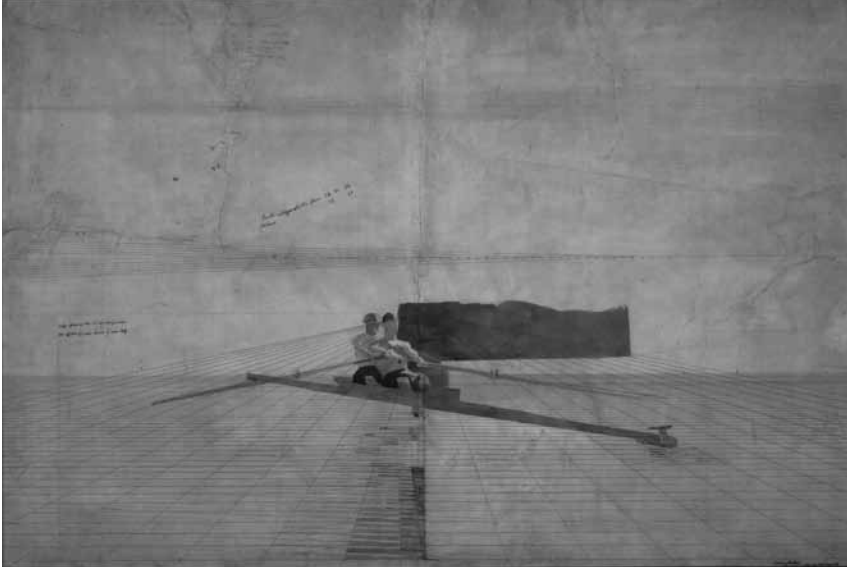
*Perspective Drawing for "The Pair-Oared Shell," 1872*

Graphite, ink, and watercolor on paper

31<sup>13</sup>/<sub>16</sub> x 47<sup>9</sup>/<sub>16</sub> in. (80.8 x 120.8 cm)

Philadelphia Museum of Art, Purchased with the Thomas Skelton Harrison Fund, 1944.45-1;

photo courtesy Philadelphia Museum of Art



***Perspective Drawing for "The Pair-Oared Shell," 1872***

Graphite, ink, and wash on paper lined with Japanese tissue

31 1/8 x 47 1/8 in. (78.9 x 119.7 cm)

Philadelphia Museum of Art, Purchased with the Thomas Skelton Harrison Fund, 1944.45-2; photo courtesy Philadelphia Museum of Art

***The Pair-Oared Shell, 1872***

Oil on canvas

24 x 36 in. (60.96 x 91.44 cm)

Philadelphia Museum of Art, Gift of Mrs. Thomas Eakins and Miss Mary Adeline Williams, 1929-184-35; photo courtesy Philadelphia Museum of Art / Art Resource, NY



***The Biglin Brothers Turning the Stake, 1873***

Oil on canvas

39 $\frac{7}{8}$  x 59 $\frac{1}{8}$  in. (101.3 x 151.4 cm)

The Cleveland Museum of Art, Hinman B. Hurlbut Collection, 1984.1927;

photo © The Cleveland Museum of Art

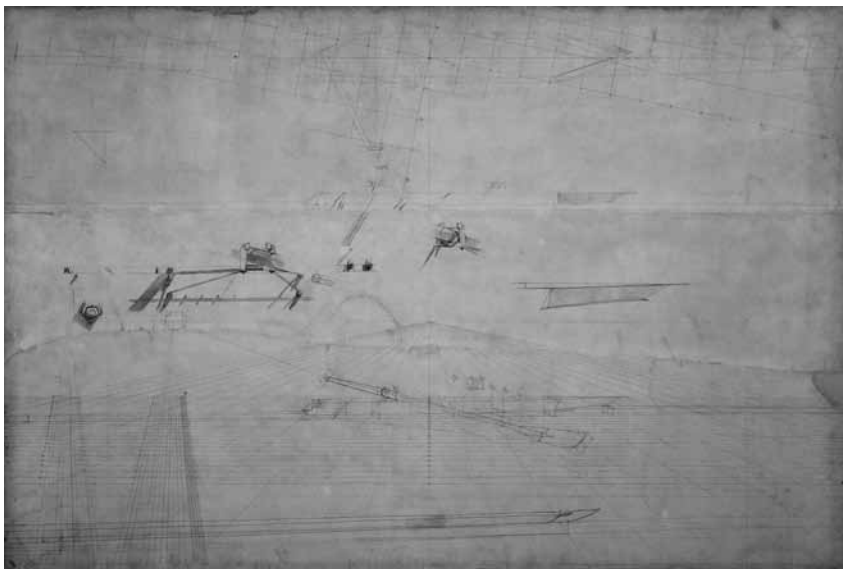
***John Biglin in a Single Scull, c. 1873***

Watercolor on off-white paper

19 $\frac{3}{16}$  x 24 $\frac{7}{16}$  in. (49.1 x 63.32 cm)

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Fletcher Fund, 1924 (24.108);

image copyright © The Metropolitan Museum of Art / Art Resource, NY



***Perspective Drawing for "The Biglin Brothers Racing," 1873***

Pen and ink, colored ink, pencil, and watercolor wash on paper

31 $\frac{1}{8}$  x 47 $\frac{5}{8}$  in. (81.0 x 120.0 cm)

Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C., Gift of Joseph H. Hirshhorn, 1966, 66.1524; photo courtesy of Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, by Lee Stalsworth

***The Biglin Brothers Racing, 1873***

Oil on canvas

24 $\frac{3}{8}$  x 36 $\frac{3}{8}$  in. (61.3 x 91.8 cm)

National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C., Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Cornelius Vanderbilt Whitney, 1953.7.1; photo © 2011 National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.



***Whistling for Plover, 1874***

Transparent watercolor and small touches of opaque watercolor over graphite on cream paper  
 11  $\frac{5}{16}$  x 16  $\frac{13}{16}$  in. (28.7 x 42.4 cm)

Brooklyn Museum, Museum Collection Fund, 25.656; photo courtesy Brooklyn Museum

***Rail Shooting on the Delaware, 1876***

Oil on canvas  
 22  $\frac{7}{8}$  x 30  $\frac{3}{4}$  in. (56.2 x 76.8 cm)

Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Bequest of Stephen Carlton Clark, B.A., 1903 (1961.18.21);  
 photo courtesy Yale University; Art Gallery / Art Resource, NY



***Sailboats on the New Jersey Shore, c. 1881***

Albumen silver print

3  $\frac{1}{8}$  x 3  $\frac{1}{4}$  in. (7.9 x 9.4 cm)

Philadelphia Museum of Art, Gift of Seymour Adelman, 1968; photo courtesy Philadelphia Museum of Art

***Starting Out After Rail, 1874***

Watercolor, pen and ink, and graphite on cream paper

25  $\frac{3}{4}$  x 20  $\frac{3}{8}$  in. (65.41 x 51.12 cm)

Wichita Art Museum, Roland P. Murdock Collection (M26.41); photo courtesy Wichita Art Museum





***Baseball Players Practicing*, 1875**

Watercolor over charcoal on paper

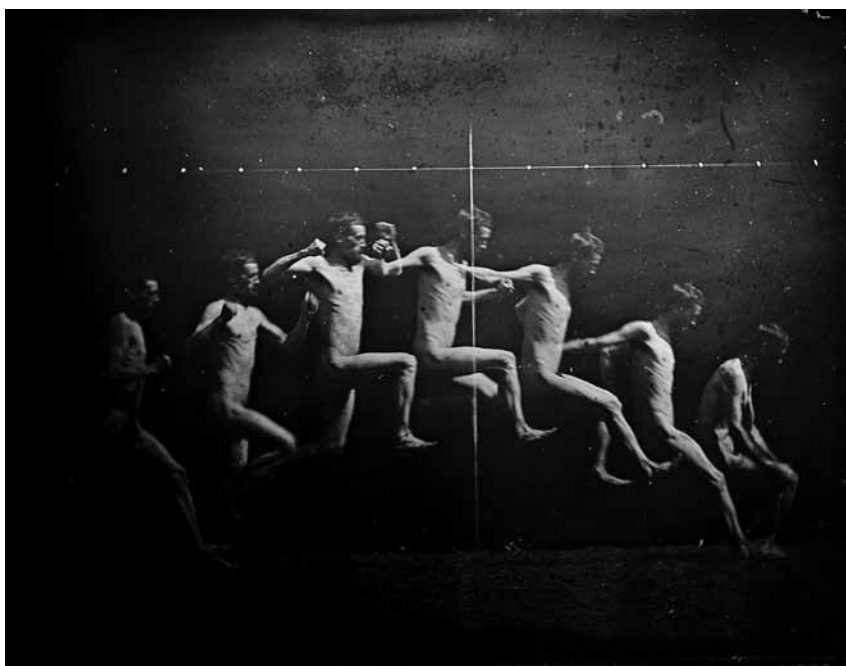
10 7/8 x 13 in. (27.6 x 33.0 cm)

Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, Jesse Metcalf Fund, and Walter H. Kimball Fund, 36.172; photo courtesy of the Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, by Erik Gould



*Trotting Horses: Fairman Rogers' Four-in-Hand*, 1879, cast posthumously 1946  
Bronze  
10 ¼ x 34 ½ x 12 in. (26.0 x 87.6 x 30.5 cm)  
Yale University Art Gallery, Gift of the Estate of Paul Mellon, B.A. 1929, 2000.25.3;  
photo courtesy of Yale University Art Gallery

*A May Morning in the Park (The Fairman Rogers Four-in-Hand)*, 1879-80  
Oil on canvas  
23 ¾ x 36 in. (60.3 x 91.4 cm)  
Philadelphia Museum of Art, Gift of William Alexander Dick, 1930-105;  
photo courtesy Philadelphia Museum of Art / Art Resource, NY



***Naked Series: George Reynolds, 1883***

Albumen silver prints mounted on board

3½ x 7½ in. (7.8 x 18.6 cm)

The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, 84.XM.254.22;

photo courtesy The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles

***Man, Running, Broad Jump, 1884-85***

Glass-plate negative

7⅞ x 9⅞ in. (20.0 x 25.3 cm)

From the Historical and Interpretive Collections of the Franklin Institute, Inc., Philadelphia, PA,  
box 2, no 2, 015; copy photograph courtesy of Charles Penniman, 2010



***Thomas Eakins and John Laurie Wallace at the Shore, c. 1883***

Platinum print

10 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 8 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>16</sub> in. (25.5 x 20.4 cm)

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, David Hunter McAlpin Fund, 1943 (43.87.23);

image copyright © The Metropolitan Museum of Art / Art Resource, NY

***Photograph of Rock Thrower (Back View), 1883***

Albumen print

3 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 2 in. irreg. (9.2 x 5.0 cm)

Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C.,

Gift of Joseph H. Hirshhorn, 1966, 83.19; photo courtesy of Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden,

Smithsonian Institution, by Lee Stalsworth

***Male Nudes in a Seated Tug-of-War, 1884***

Albumen print

3 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> x 4 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in. (9.5 x 12.1 cm)

The Detroit Institute of Arts; Founders Society Purchase, R. H. Tannahill Foundation Fund, F77.106;

photo courtesy Detroit Institute of Arts, licensed by the Bridgeman Art Library



***Swimming [The Swimming Hole], 1884–85***

Oil on canvas

27 $\frac{7}{16}$  x 36 $\frac{1}{16}$  in. (69.4 x 92.2 cm)

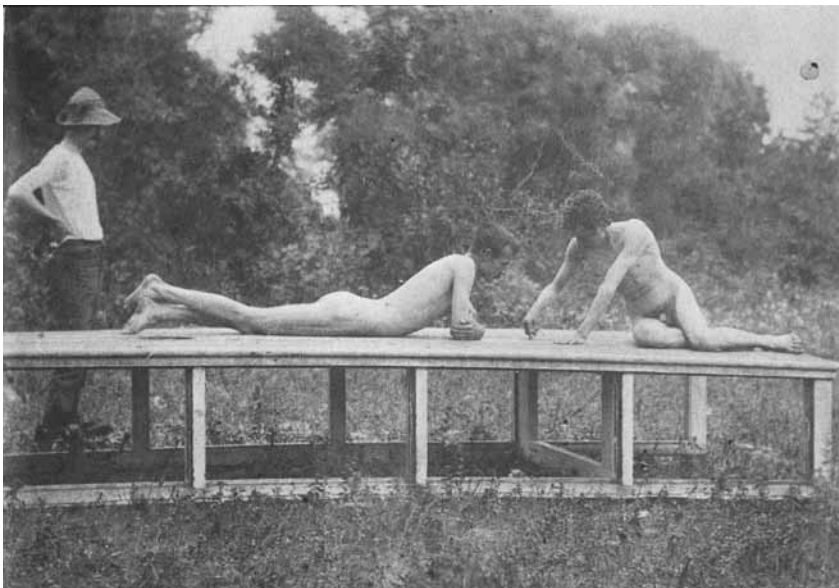
Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth, Texas, purchased by the Friends of Art, Fort Worth Art Association, 1925; acquired by the Amon Carter Museum, 1990, from the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth through grants and donations from the Amon G. Carter Foundation, the Sid. W. Richardson Foundation, the Anne Burnett and Charles Tandy Foundation, Capital Cities/ABC Foundation, Fort Worth Star-Telegram, The R. D. and Joan Dale Hubbard Foundation and the people of Fort Worth, 1991.19.1; photo © Amon Carter Museum

***Study for "The Swimming Hole," 1884***

Oil on fiberboard mounted on fiberboard

8 $\frac{3}{4}$  x 10 $\frac{3}{4}$  in. (22.1 x 27 cm)

Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Gift of Joseph H. Hirshhorn, 1966, 66.150; photo courtesy of Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, by Lee Stalsworth



***Male Clothed, Standing, and Male Nude Named J. Laurie Wallace Nude, Reclining on Platform in Wooded Landscape, c. 1883***

Albumen print

3 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 4 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in. (7.94 x 10.48 cm)

The Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Charles Bregler's Thomas Eakins Collection

Purchased with the partial support of the Pew Memorial Trust, 1985.68.2.476;

photo courtesy The Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts

***Eakins's Students at the Site of "The Swimming Hole," 1883***

Albumen print

3 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 4 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in. (9.3 x 12.1 cm) Mount: 4 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> x 6 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> in. (10.8 x 16.5 cm)

The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, 84.XM.811.1;

photo courtesy The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles

***Male Figures at the Site of "Swimming," 1884***

Albumen print

3 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> x 3 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in. irreg. (8.1 x 9.5 cm)

Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Gift of Joseph H. Hirshhorn,

1966, 83.15; photo courtesy of Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden,

Smithsonian Institution, by Lee Stalsworth

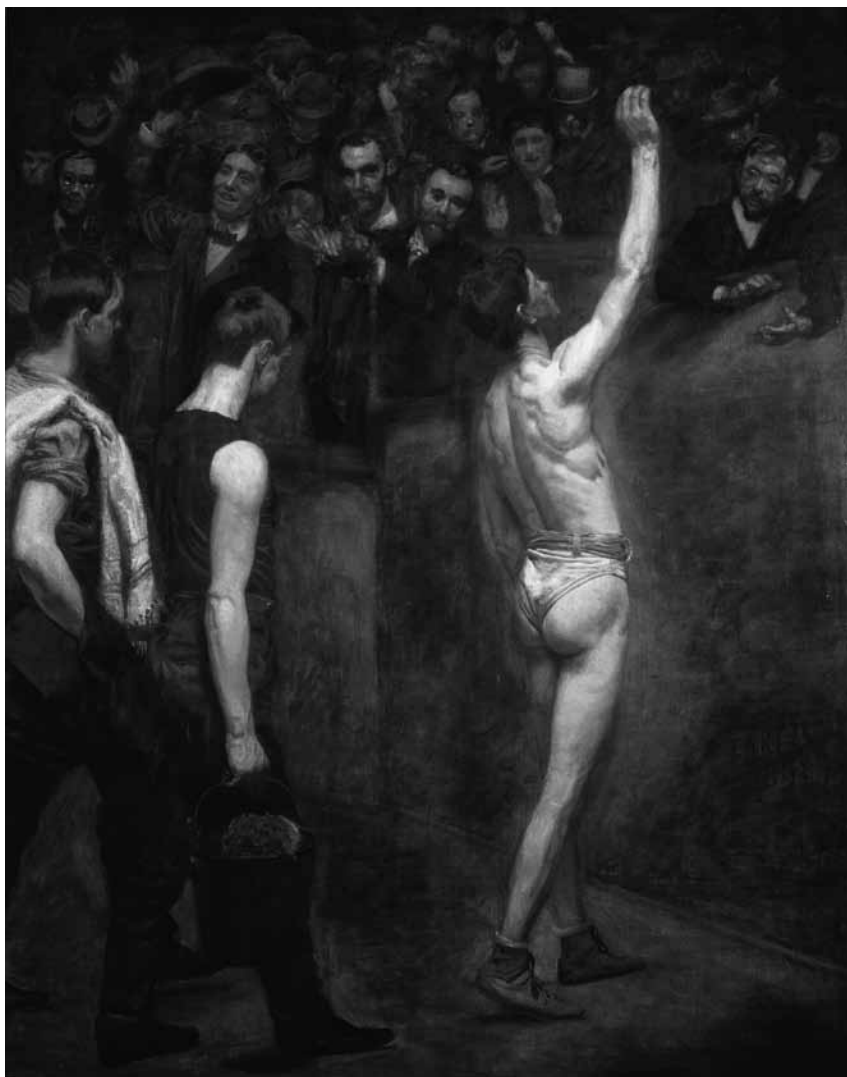


*Between Rounds*, 1898-99

Oil on canvas

50 $\frac{1}{8}$  x 39 $\frac{7}{8}$  in. (127.3 x 101.3 cm)

Philadelphia Museum of Art, Gift of Mrs. Thomas Eakins and Miss Mary Adeline Williams,  
1929-184-16; photo courtesy Philadelphia Museum of Art / Art Resource, NY



*Salutat*, 1898

Oil on canvas

50 x 40 in. (127 cm x 101.6 cm)

Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, Andover, Massachusetts, gift of anonymous donor, 1930.18; photo © Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, Andover, MA





***Wrestlers*, 1899**

Oil on canvas

48 $\frac{3}{8}$  x 60 in. (122.9 x 152.4 cm)

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Gift of Cecile C. Bartman and the Cecile and Fred Bartman Foundation, M.2007.1; photo © 2011 Museum Associates / LACMA



# 1. In His Own Words, 1868

Eakins preferred not to write about his art, claiming in 1893, "For the public I believe my life is all in my work."<sup>1</sup> Most of his references to art can be found in his correspondence. He was close to his family and wrote often while he was studying in Europe (1866–70), describing his studies, daily routine, and special events. He not only discussed his evolving opinions on painting but repeatedly mentioned athletic activities: he went ice skating, swimming, and regularly exercised by wrestling at a gymnasium. He also mentioned watching men play tennis and being greatly impressed by the new two-wheel bicycle. In addition, he kept track of the sculling activities and races of his friends back home. During a rest cure in the Dakota Territory in 1887, he wrote that he was enjoying horseback riding and hunting. A decade after that, while in Maine painting a portrait of Professor Henry A. Rowland, he took time off to sail with his sitter and to teach him how to ride a bicycle (Eakins had learned earlier in the 1890s).<sup>2</sup>

In an 1868 letter from Paris to his father, Eakins tellingly used his love of sports to express his philosophy of art. Rejecting the traditional reliance on studying from classical statuary, he looked to nature's example for inspiration and truth, and he described finding the process of boating comparable to the act of creating. Using various boating metaphors, he discussed art-making in terms of sailing. The letter serves as something of an art manifesto.<sup>3</sup> His reference to Nature's boat as a canoe, a typically American type, indicates that Eakins was already aware that it was in his native country that he would pursue his profession.<sup>4</sup>

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- 1 This quote from an 1893 questionnaire that Eakins completed has been quoted repeatedly throughout the literature. It may have first been published in Bryson Burrough's Introduction in *Loan Exhibition of the Works of Thomas Eakins* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1917), vii.
  - 2 For instance, see Thomas Eakins letters, October 8, 1866; January 24, March 21, August 10, and November 9, 1867; and February [23 or 24], 1868; August 28, 1887; and July–August 1897; all in the Charles Bregler Collection, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia.
  - 3 Kathleen Foster referred to this letter as a "manifesto" and suggests Eakins used the boating imagery for the benefit of his father, who had long enjoyed hunting. In Kathleen A. Foster and Cheryl Leibold, *Writing about Eakins: The Manuscripts in Charles Bregler's Thomas Eakins Collection* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press for the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, 1989), 57.
  - 4 That this type of boat is typically American is noted in Bruce Robertson, "Thomas Eakins's Wrestlers and the Practice of Art," *American Art* (SAAM) 23 (Fall 2009): 85.

# Letter to his father, Benjamin Eakins

THOMAS EAKINS, 1868

Paris, Friday, March 6, 1868

Dear Father,

. . . The big artist does not sit down monkey like & copy a coal scuttle or an ugly old woman like some Dutch painters have done nor a dungpile, but he keeps a sharp eye on Nature & steals her tools. He learns what she does with light the big tool & then color then form and appropriates them to his own use. Then he's got a canoe of his own smaller than Nature's but big enough for every purpose except to paint the midday sun which is not beautiful at all. It is plenty strong enough though to make midday sunlight or the setting sun if you know how to handle it. With this canoe he can sail parallel to Nature's sailing. He will soon be sailing only where he wants to selecting nice little coves & shady shores or storms to his own liking, but if ever he thinks he can sail another fashion from Nature or make a better shaped boat he'll capsize or stick in the mud & nobody will buy his pictures or sail with him in his old tub. If a big painter wants to draw a coal scuttle he can do it better than the man that has been doing nothing but coal scuttles all his life. That's sailing up Pig's run among mud & slops and back houses. The big painter sees Nature—the marks that Nature's big boat made in the mud & he understands them & profits by them. The lummix that ~~don't~~ never wondered why they were there rows his tub about instead of sailing it & where he chances to see one of Natures marks why he'll slap his tub into the mud to make his mark too but he'll miss most of them not knowing where to look for them. But if more light comes on to the concern that is the tide comes up the marks are all hidden & the big artist knows that nature would have sailed her boat a different way entirely & he sails his as well near as he can to how nature would have sailed hers according to his experience & memory & sense. The stick in the mud shows some invention he has for still hunting these old marks a plumb line to scrape the shore and he flatters himself with his ability to tell a boat mark from a muskrat hole in the deepest water, and then he thinks he knows nature a great deal better than any one else. I have seen big log books kept

with of the distances made in different tacks by great artists without saying a word about tide or wind or anything else the length of a certain bone in the leg of a certain statue compared to the bone of the nose of a certain other one & a connection with some mystic number the whole which would more mystify the artists that made them than anyone else. Then the professors as they are called read Greek poetry for inspiration & talk classic & give out classic subjects & make a fellow draw antique not see how beautiful those simple hearted big men sailed but to observe their mud marks which are easier to see & measure than to understand. I love sunlight & children & beautiful women & men their heads & hands & most everything I see & some day I expect to paint them as I see them and even paint some that I remember or imagine make up from old memories of love & light & warmth &c &c. but if I went to Greece to live there twenty years I could not paint a Greek subject for I would my head would be full of classics the nasty besmeared wooden hard gloomy tragic figures of this the great French school of the last few centuries & Ingres & the Greek letters I learned at the High School with old Haverstick & my mud marks of the antique statues. . . .

[unsigned]



## 2. Contemporaneous Commentary, 1871-1916

During his lifetime, Eakins was mentioned in reviews of group exhibitions, chatty news reports, anthologies, and early histories of American art. Exhibition reviews were primarily descriptive as they lacked illustrations and photographs (woodblock prints began appearing sporadically in the 1870s, and illustrated art journals did not become the norm until the twentieth century). Writers focused on a painting's subject and formal aspects, providing their opinions in simple, straightforward language. They disliked Eakins's color and dry paint surface, but deemed his drawing "remarkable" and his handling "vigorous," more so than that of the genteel tradition of late-nineteenth-century American Impressionism, Symbolism, and Aestheticism.

Eakins's sporting images fared much better than *The Gross Clinic*, which was categorically attacked for inappropriate subject matter and its related brutality. Discussions involved the issue of "the picturesque," that is, what was considered appropriate, and the debate revealed both conservative and progressive attitudes toward the new, modern lifestyle then emerging. Most praised Eakins's daring in presenting "commonplace" subjects; others thought sports entirely too violent. Earl Shinn was the sole commentator who positively equated American athletes with ancient Greek statuary. The early critics did not forget Eakins's French training, but ultimately they thought his virility, originality, and individuality distinguished him as uniquely American. Not surprisingly, a French commentator found Eakins's *Negro Whistling Plover* "exotic" and "strange," euphemisms for America.

Critics generally admired the artist's exactitude, and they referred to the character of his realism (both in terms of subject and technique) as well as to his fascination with science as "truthful." Some works were considered more experimental, and these elicited a debate about science and art. Such a controversy had emerged in American art in the 1850s under Ruskin's truth to nature banner, and it was encouraged later with the rise of Impressionism. Eakins's fascination merely continued the debate during an era when the United States was becoming a technologically advanced, modern nation.

# Two Anonymous Reviews

## 1871

Thomas Eakins shows two, a portrait and a river scene, entitled *The Champion Sculls* [*The Champion Single Sculls*]. While manifesting marked ability, especially in the painting of the rower, in the foreground, the whole effect is scarcely satisfactory. The light on the water, on the rower, and on the trees lining the bank indicate that the sun is blazing fiercely, but on looking upward one perceives a curiously dull leaden sky.

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"Art: Third Reception of the Union League," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, April 27, 1871, 4. Excerpt.

The latter artist [Eakins], who has lately returned from Europe and the influence of Gérôme, has also a picture, *The Champion Single Sculls* (No. 137), which, though peculiar, has more than ordinary interest. This artist, in dealing so boldly and broadly with the commonplace in nature, is working upon well-supported theories, and, despite a somewhat scattered effect, gives promise of a conspicuous future. A walnut frame would greatly improve the present work.

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"The Fine Arts: The Third Reception at the Union League, III," *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, April 28, 1871, 1. Excerpt.



# Fine Arts: The Water-Color Society's Exhibition—II

EARL SHINN, 1875

The most admirable figure-studies, however, for pure natural force and virility, are those of Mr. Eakins, in which the method of Gérôme is applied to subjects the antipodes of those affected by the French realist. Mr. Eakins shows three sheets, one representing racing-boats drifting in a calm [*Drifting*], one a negro crouched in the grass and decoying plover by imitating their cry [*Whistling for Plover*], and one a pair of base-ball players [*Baseball Players Practicing*]. The selection of the themes in itself shows artistic insight, for American sporting-life is the most Olympian, beautiful, and genuine side of its civilization from the plastic point of view; and the treatment, though a little stiff and labored, is pre-eminently sincere. The negro's face is modeled like a bronze, within the size of one's thumb-nail; the business of the scene, in all three of the pictures, is attended to with the religious fidelity which a Greek sculptor would show in a commemorative athletic statue; and the forms of the youthful ball-players, indeed, exceed most Greek work we know of in their particular aim of expressing alert strength in a moment of tension.

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Earl Shinn, "Fine Arts: The Water-Color Society's Exhibition—II," *The Nation* 20 (February 18, 1875): 119-20. Excerpt, 120.

# Salon de 1875—XVI: Les Étrangers

PAUL LEROI, 1875

There are a multitude of names from the United States in the catalogue; these are now only students, but full of promise. Among the men who have arrived, I only see Mr. May, . . . and Mr. Thomas Eakins, a disciple of Mr. Gérôme, who sends from Philadelphia a very strange painting; it is nevertheless far from being without merit. *Une chasse aux États-Unis* [*A Hunt in the United States*] (no. 757) is a true work of precision; it is rendered as a photograph; there is a truth of movement and of details really great and singular. This exotic product teaches us some things, and its author is not to be forgotten; one has to deal with a seeker with a whim, it is necessary to wait for what he finds, and his findings may be interesting and even more agreeable.

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Paul Leroi [pseud.], "Salon de 1875—XVI: Les Étrangers," *L'Art: Revue hebdomadaire illustrée*, 2 (1875): 270–76. Excerpt, 276; translated by Ilene S. Fort.

# Budding Academicians: American Genre Pictures

ANONYMOUS, 1879

Scant justice has been done a genre picture [*A Pair-Oared Shell*] by Thomas Eakins of Philadelphia, which hangs in the West Room. It is so far above the line that its great merits can scarcely be appreciated except on a brilliant day. Then it will be found remarkable for good drawing, natural and quiet composition, and a pleasant feeling in the color—speaking of the picture as a whole. In a less technical sense, it is also an entrance into a sphere of human activity where one might have expected that artists would have sought for subjects long ago. It represents two powerful young men pulling a pair-oar out-rigger under one of the high bridges that cross the Schuylkill. They are enjoying a leisurely spin for practice, and may readily have been taken from one of the crews that made the quiet waters of the Schuylkill lively during the Summer of the Centennial Exhibition. As in all of Mr. Eakins's work, there is a slight constraint in the handling, the merest suspicion of conventionality and commonplace, but that we must accept as part of this strong painter's individuality. Meanwhile, consider what the other painters who attempt American genre would have made of it. Mr. J. S. Brown, for instance, has in the Corridor a series of six studies, mostly of fishermen, made on his favorite spot, the Island of Grand Menan, New-Brunswick. It is true that they show a much better grasp of art than his work of previous years, but there is still very much lacking to make him a successful painter of American genre. His crudeness of color, his inability to "match colors," so to speak, although it is wearing off a little, remains especially apparent in such sketches as those, where, under the idea that out-door effects must be tendered, literally, the results are harsh and painty. Mr. Eakins steers clear of this in his picture of rowing men under the Schuylkill Bridge. The shadow of the bridge is felt, although nothing more than one of the huge stone piers is visible; and if it were possible to conceive that an artist who paints like Mr. Eakins had a poetic impression, we would like to think that in this composition he had tried to express the peculiar charm that every one has experienced when rowing out of the sunlight into the shadow of a great bridge.

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"Budding Academicians: American Genre Pictures," *New York Times*, April 20, 1879, 10. Excerpt.

# Art at the Academy: Second Annual Exhibition of the Philadelphia Society of Artists—Sixth Notice

AUTHOR UNCERTAIN, 1880

Mr. Eakins's two contributions, nos. 349 and 339, have been named, as if intended to be considered pictures, but the artist probably does not so consider them. No. 339 [*The Biglin Brothers Turning the Stake*] is a study of young athletes, in rowing costume, pulling at the oar. As a study of the figure in action it would be of great value to the Academy schools, the representation of splendid muscular development and the suggestion of great physical power in excited exercise being perfect. The force of drawing can no further go, and, if Mr. Eakins is satisfied with this, he has reached the end of his tether. If such work could only be put to picturesque uses. We might have indeed a new school of art in America, but it is not so subordinated in this production or in any other that we have ever seen from his easel, the work standing for its own worth alone and not for any representative value. The attractive and pleasing elements are very carefully or very carelessly left out, and only students considerably well advanced will care to look at this work.

No. 349 [*A May Morning in the Park*], a drag and four-in-hand, with figures, is simply a puzzle to an ordinary observer. We believe it was intended as an attempt to correct errors of observation in drawing horses in motion, but this explanation is not authoritative. The instantaneous photograph has demonstrated that with all our looking at horses we have never seen how they move their feet, and in view of this discovery Mr. Eakins has formulated certain theories, mathematical and anatomical, which this work purports to illustrate. As a mechanical experiment it may be a success; on that point we express no judgment, but as to the matter of framing the experiment, hanging it in a picture gallery, and calling it a *Spring Morning in the Park* [*A May Morning in the Park*] we have to express a judgment decidedly adverse.

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"Art at the Academy: Second Annual Exhibition of the Philadelphia Society of Artists—Sixth Notice," *The Press* (Philadelphia), November 25, 1880, 5. Excerpt.

# The Philadelphia Exhibition—II

MARIANA GRISWOLD VAN RENSSELAER, 1880

Amongst home works the first place belongs, I think, to the strong and intensely characteristic work of Mr. Eakins. There is, perhaps, no artist in the country who can rival him for originality of conception, artistic use, no one who imprints a sign-manual of individuality so strongly on everything he touches. One of his pictures in this exhibition is called [*The Biglin Brothers*] *Turning the Stake—a Pair-Oared Race*. It is very strong in drawing, and the moment is cleverly chosen when the stroke backs water and his action is in contrast with that of his mate. The color of the picture is rather curiously dark. "It wants light" one hears it said, but I do not feel that there is in it any actual want of light such as we have seen in Mr. Weeks's picture, for example. To my mind at least, the canvas is simply pitched in a low and somewhat unusual key, which is yet perfectly justifiable and which justifies itself, indeed, for we comprehend at once that a sunlight effect is intended. Another singular point, perhaps, is the way in which very strong blues give the color-note to the canvas. They are found in the large flag and the headdresses, and are continued in the water. They are neither the pale and faded nor the very dark blues to which artists usually resort for safety when they needs must undertake the color. They are deep and brilliant, and most uncompromising. They have been criticized by many in my hearing, but merely, it seemed to me, in deference to the conventional theory about blues in general. If we imagine the picture with its blues changed to the more usual reds, for instance, we find that it loses [*sic*] at once much of its singular force and charm. Mr. Eakin's other picture excites even more of comment than this one. It is a rather small canvas, called *A May Morning in the Park*, and represents a four-in-hand with a portrait-group of figures on top of the coach. The figures are admirable for life and accuracy, and yet for the way in which they are made to take their unobtrusive part in the general scheme. Here we have red instead of blue; not the conventional shades, however, but the rather aggressive scarlet which the coach builder seems to love, and which is here

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Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer, "The Philadelphia Exhibition—II," *American Architect and Building News* 8 (December 25, 1880): 303-4. Excerpt, 303.

continued by the vivid parasol above. The painting, as such, is admirable, the misty morning effect is well given, and one only regrets that the green foliage which forms a solid background is not a little more subdued in tint. The disputed point in this picture is the curious way in which the horses are given. It is an established fact, I have been told, that a trotting horse has but one foot on the ground at a time. Instantaneous photographs are said to demonstrate this, and Mr. Eakins has painted his steeds in accordance with such evidence as theirs rather than with that of the unsophisticated eye. The result may be false. No amount of knowledge on the subject will ever teach our eyes to see a horse with three feet poised in the air. We shall forever see him with at least two feet for support, as we shall forever say "the sun rises" and "the moon sets." It is strange for the every line he draws, to hear the most callow critics pause in front of his canvas and say, "All out of drawing! Dreadful!" Yet after finding that every visitor without exception bears witness to the strangeness of the effect portrayed, and after reflecting that art is not for the scientifically-instructed mind, but for the eye, which sees optically, so to speak, and not scientifically, no matter how accurate and how sensitive it may be, one must confess to wishing that Mr. Eakins had denied himself the pleasure of a fascinating little experiment, and had painted his horses in the time-worn way.

# The Exhibitions: III—Second Annual Exhibition of the Philadelphia Society of Artists

SYLVESTER R. KOEHLER, 1881

Finally, the importance of the artist demands that Mr. Thomas Eakins's [*The Biglin Brothers*] *Turning the Stake* and *A May Morning in the Park* should not be passed by in silence, although that course would be the more agreeable. That Mr. Eakins is a colorist, no one, we think, has ever claimed; but that he is a strong artist, with a strange power of fascination, will more readily be admitted. And yet these two pictures are not only utterly without color, but also utterly lifeless. The *May Morning* represents a coach in Fairmount Park. It is said that the artist studied the motion of the horses from the instantaneous photographs lately taken on race-courses. The result is that each limb is motionless, while the spokes of the wheels of the vehicle whirl about so rapidly that they cannot be seen. As a demonstration of the fact that the artist must fail when he attempts to depict what *is*, instead of what *seems to be*, this picture is of great value, and perhaps the artist himself has by this time seen his mistake, and only allows the picture to be shown so that others may profit by his experience.

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Sylvester R. Koehler, "The Exhibitions: III—Second Annual Exhibition of the Philadelphia Society of Artists," *American Art Review* 2 (January 1881): 103-15. Excerpt, 110.

# The Fine Arts: The Spring Exhibition at the Academy—Second Notice

WILLIAM CLARK, 1881

It is worth noting, in connection with the above, how many of our artists have taken to interpreting pure white daylight. In some particulars the most interesting attempt in this line in the exhibition is Mr. Eakins's *Starting Out for Rail*, No. 335. This picture is notable for the reason that Mr. Eakins so frequently and, as we think, so needlessly sacrifices the light in his pictures to other considerations. It is, simply considered as a rendition of white sun light, only partially successful, although it is a work that the more it is studied the more the artist's aim in this particular is made apparent. The radical defect of the work is that it has absolutely no color quality, although color is just what it imperatively needs to give it real vitality. This is a splendid little picture, however, despite its shortcomings. It bears upon its face the fact that it is the work of a man who is an eager, exhaustive, and conscientious student of Nature, who cares for nothing that Nature cannot tell him, and who is profoundly convinced that what Nature cannot tell an artist is not worth the telling. Mr. Eakins's *Base-ball Players Practising*, No. 381, is an early work, and his *Biglin Brothers Practising [The Paired-Oar Shell]* No. 76, is a still earlier one. This last mentioned is one of the pictures which gave such a shock to the artistic conventionalities of Philadelphia when it was first shown here some seven or eight years ago. It is a very characteristic work, and a very excellent one. The sky to the left seems rather too high in tone for the peculiar effect of sunlight attempted, and the work is marked by a certain hardness of manner, from which the artist has not even yet been able to free himself. But making all allowance for deficiencies, there is nothing in the exhibition that can compete with these pictures in certain intrinsically valuable qualities, or that will be more instructive to those who will take the trouble to study out the secret of their worth.

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William Clark, "The Fine Arts: The Spring Exhibition at the Academy—Second Notice," *Daily Evening Telegraph* (Philadelphia), April 6, 1881, 5. Excerpt.



# At the Private View: First Impressions of the Autumn Exhibition at the Academy of the Fine Arts

ANONYMOUS, 1885

The picture contributed by Mr. Eakins [*Swimming*], the master at the Academy, is not agreeable. It represents a group of men bathing and is evidently intended to show the results of instantaneous photography. The attitude of the diver is presumably correct, but it does not convey the impression of any possible motion and neither the flesh painting nor the general color of the picture is pleasing.

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"At the Private View: First Impressions of the Autumn Exhibition at the Academy of the Fine Arts," *The Times* (Philadelphia), October 29, 1885, [2]. Excerpt.

# Art: The Awards of Prizes at the Academy

LESLIE W. MILLER, 1885

Mr. Eakins has done some very strange things, and while compelling admiration for his knowledge and skill in certain important respects, has kept his friends perpetually apologizing for him by the wildness of his errors in dealing with other things of quite as much importance. In nothing that he has done however has his work been so persistently and inexcusably bad as in the landscapes which he has introduced as backgrounds for his figures. That in the *Swimming*, shown at the present exhibition, will serve as a fair illustration, and the extent of the mischief which such an example exerts is only to be judged by these reflections of it which disfigure the work of most of the older students.

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[Leslie W. Miller] L. W. M., "Art: The Awards of Prizes at the Academy," *The American: Journal of Literature, Science, The Arts, and Public Affairs* (Philadelphia) 11 (November 7, 1885): 44-45. Excerpt, 45.

# Art Notes

ANONYMOUS, 1886

A current press paragraph makes inquiry why our artists neglect the picturesque side of out-door games like base ball, tennis, etc., and cites Thomas Eakins's rowing pictures, and Donoho's *Bicyclists*, exhibited by the Society of American Artists, as instances of successful treatment of these subjects. The trouble is that these games are not picturesque. Athletic sports involve violent action; the better the game the more violent the players' movements. Painful exertion and strained effort are fatal to picturesque effect. Statuesque subjects have been treated by the great sculptors with such consummate skill as to overcome these difficulties, but in pictures, the masters subdue or subordinate representations of awkward, ungraceful and exhausting muscular tension. The cases cited illustrate the proposition that the representation of out-door gymnastics cannot be made picturesque. Mr. Eakins's rowing pictures referred to are not pictures at all, but studies. They are intended to educate the eye and hand of the artists and not to please the beholder. They are very clever studies executed with great skill, but studies all the same. As to Mr. Donoho's *Bicyclists*, if there is any other invention that will distort the human body into more painful, disjointed, repulsively grotesque attitudes than this same bicycle does, it has yet to be brought to public notice.

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"Art Notes," *The American: Journal of Literature, Science, The Arts, and Public Affairs* (Philadelphia) 12 (September 25, 1886): 365.

# Movements in American Painting: The Clark Collection in New York

CHARLES DE KAY, 1887

Only four painters can be spoken of here, and of the four two have studied in Europe; two are homebred. Thomas L. [sic] Eakins is a Philadelphian who returned to his native place after a very thorough training at the École des Beaux-Arts and in the studios of the painters Bonnat and Gérôme, together with a certain amount of work with the sculptor Dumont. He has done much teaching in Philadelphia, where, until lately, he was instructor in the life-school of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. In 1878 he taught in the School of Practical Anatomy, and is now at the head of a schism from the Academy schools. Eakins made his mark at the Centennial Exhibition with *Chess-players*, a broadly and severely painted interior, very dark, very realistic, very sober. He has painted many portraits. . . . Eakins has iron-bound limits in execution, but very remarkable originality. He has boldly seized on subjects never attempted before by artists of his training and parts, such as a water-colour of the national pastime called *Baseball* [*Baseball Players Practicing*], an oil-painting of an expert sculler seated in his outrigger, a sportsman *Whistling for Plover*, and a view of the Delaware River covered with such uncouth sailing craft as factory operatives can obtain when they wish to take a sail. The picture here produced is not his best, but it is far from his worst; perhaps *Chess-players* and one other, *Listening to Music*, surpass it. The people's note is struck again. . . . It is peculiarly characteristic for just that reason, since Mr. Eakins is always inclined to put things as badly as possible, as if he had a perfect hatred of neat and showy outsides.

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Charles De Kay, "Movements in American Painting: The Clark Collection in New York," *Magazine of Art* 10 (1887): 37-42. Excerpt, 39.

# Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts Exhibition as Seen and Heard

MITSCHKA, 1899

*Salutat*, by Tom Eakins, is hardly the representative canvas of that strong anatomist. Here we have the interior of an arena, the modern pugilistic victor claiming the thundering applause of his audience, with his seconds in close attendance. The main factors are good, but the audience is too obtrusive. Eakins has brought them so far forward as to give the impression that both victor and audience might easily shake hands. The coloring also would lead one to suppose the fight took place in broad daylight, two faults that the keen perceives of that artist would not overlook in another; aside from this the technic and close observance of the lines of anatomy are in the same style as of old, always coarse, never beautiful, but often true.

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Mitschka [pseud.], "Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts Exhibition as Seen and Heard," *Art Collector* 9, no. 7 (1899): 102. Excerpt.



### 3. Constructing the Myth, 1917–1940

During the first decades after Eakins's death, the literature was overwhelmingly positive and patriotic. Consisting of exhibition catalogues, brochures, and reviews; of announcements, appreciations, and biographical articles, all this led up to the publication of the first monograph on Eakins. The exhibitions now were solo showings: first there were large memorials at major museums, then usually smaller displays at commercial galleries. The first touring exhibitions on Eakins, initiated by the artist's widow, Susan, in the hope of selling more of his art, traveled throughout the country. The brochures and catalogues published for these were mere checklists, some with short tributes to the artist. Rarely did these texts refer to specific paintings.

With the increasing presence of Eakins's work in the public arena, institutions began to purchase examples and museums announced their new acquisitions. At first, such statements were primarily laudatory about the artist and congratulatory to the museum; by the 1930s the tone of these changed and they became more analytical. They presented the type of information that would serve, decades later, as the basis for scholarly catalogue entries.

Exhibitions of the 1920s and early 1930s encouraged the appearance of the first articles devoted to Eakins and his art. Although some added to the growing biography of the artist, they were more in the nature of appreciations. Based substantially on the accounts provided by the artist's widow, friends, and former students, they were quite biased, recounting almost exclusively what Eakins's intimates wanted to make public. They paralleled the tone of the numerous reviews of exhibitions held by commercial galleries promoting and selling the works. The literature that would create the legend of Eakins as the great American realist—delineator of truth, scientific investigator, and paragon of virtue—solidified just at the moment when his country needed a hero, at the beginning of the Great Depression.

# News and Comments in the World of Art: Thomas Eakins, I

HENRY MCBRIDE, 1917

The strength of the late Thomas Eakins as a painter, it is safe to promise, will come as a revelation to most of the students and connoisseurs who will visit the memorial exhibition of his work that will open tomorrow to invited guests and on Tuesday to the general public in the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

The name of Eakins is unfamiliar to the present art public, is practically unknown to our great collectors and is strangely absent from the lists of the so-called honors meted out by artist juries at the time of public exhibitions. Nevertheless Eakins is one of the three or four greatest artists this country has produced, and his masterpiece, the portrait of Dr. Gross, is not only one of the greatest pictures to have been produced in America but one of the greatest pictures of modern times anywhere.

Under the circumstances it can be seen that the Metropolitan Museum has undertaken an enterprise of importance—nothing more nor less than the crowning with honors of one of our most neglected geniuses. It will place the fame of Thomas Eakins. . . . Consequently in the most emphatic manner possible the public is urged to begin at once the study of the Eakins pictures and to study them long. . . .

The bent of Thomas Eakins's mind was strongly scientific, and science and scientists held great sway over him all of his life. The study of anatomy, so essentially part of an artist's training, led him to the clinics of the surgeons, that he might glean information at first hand, and to his studies in this direction, may be traced the two great pictures of Dr. Gross and Dr. Agnew.

The scientists in their turn were afterward impressed by the closeness of observation betrayed in Eakins in some of his pictures of animals in action, and a brochure by the artist on the subject, "The differential action of certain muscles passing more than one joint," was listened to with respect at the Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia in 1894.



Eakins's enthusiasm, however, was not confined wholly to the surgeons, and the series of chemists and physicists that we owe to him are impressive to a degree. Each one may be said to have received so religious a celebration at his hands that the result in effect for each is an apotheosis.

The second interest of the painter was athletics, and his boxers, swimmers and oarsmen pictures are scarcely less important than the great portraits. . . .

# Painting: A Grand Provincial

WALTER PACH, 1923

One has only to look through a collection of old photographs in some Western State-house and note the lines of firmness and thought in the rugged faces of the pioneers and builders, to see the type of American of which the supreme example is Lincoln—who differed from the other men of his period in the degree of his idealism and power rather than in the cast of his mind. If one asks oneself whether any writer has evidenced in his work the character to which these men bore witness through their lives, one is made to pause. Whitman, Emerson and Mark Twain have each some of the qualities belonging to that period; and doubtless Whitman would to-day be regarded as its greatest representative. But although the expression of a people of Anglo-Saxon stock might naturally be supposed to come through literature, I believe that it is a painter who, by the quality of his art, with its excellences and its limitations, has given us the truest record of the America of his time. It is through this quality that one may best approach the pictures now at the Brummer gallery, and so realize the significance of the work of Thomas Eakins.

In person, the painter was of the type which he represented. His head was massive, his eyes clear and determined; his bronzed skin was that of a man who had faced rough weather, and his strong jaw was only half hidden under the sparse, iron-grey beard. I once observed Mr. Eakins in conversation with his friend William M. Chase, and the contrast between the two was striking. The personal verve and distinction of the brilliant technician were arresting, even as his paintings were conspicuous in the exhibitions of his time. But the memory of the scene that comes back most vividly to me is that of the heavy figure of the older artist (older by only a few years, yet seeming of another generation), in whose slow, impassive gestures there was something of the depth and dignity of his art.

We have been long in realizing the importance of his work. It lacks the surface-charm of Whistler; it knows nothing of the soft sentiment that Americans like so much in George Inness, though perhaps the day for that is passing. Winslow Homer is of this sterner stuff, and perhaps it is through our growing appreciation of Homer that we are coming to understand the even

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more searching scrutiny of appearances that occupied the long life of Thomas Eakins. Eakins was a realist, but one must see him as more than that. His observation of men and things; his dissecting of cadavers, human and animal; his study of the natural sciences; his willingness to avail himself of photographs for his work; his patient, impersonal search after character; his severe and salutary work as a teacher; these are the facts about Eakins that until now have most impressed us. But they are not enough to explain the irrepressible rise in esteem that has lifted his work from the neglect that even the great exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum seemed for a time unable to overcome.

Were the qualities touched on above the only ones to be mentioned; were Thomas Eakins merely the sharp-eyed, strong-brained recorder of the physical or even the intellectual characteristics of the people and things he saw . . . , we should not find him filling the high place which he holds to-day. There is a force in this painter that comes from his embodying—not copying—the character of his country and generation; and such a force finds expression in relations of form and space and light that are not to be accounted for as realism. They are universal and absolute, like the truths of mathematics; they are the abstractions that we know best in music and architecture, but which must underlie the representation of the painter or sculptor if it is to live.

A picture which shows this quality with special clearness is *The Swimming Hole* [Swimming]. Disregarding the questions of colour, of the minutiae of naturalism, and of the sense of out-door light—all of which may or may not be in a great picture, and yet have for too long kept us from perceiving what this artist has to offer us—disregarding these questions, there is, above all, the nobility of scale, the emphasis on the lines and masses that build up the work into a thing of large and harmonious proportions. This quality is basic, and it is evidence of Eakins's intuitive understanding of the character of that America of the builders which finds so strong an expression in his art. Just as in a Roman portrait we see the character of the men who could conceive the great empire of that time, who could conceive the arch that traverses space with the invincible sweep of Rome itself, so every picture by Thomas Eakins is instinct with the forces that were sweeping the America of his day.

The admiration of the world of his time for the great thinkers and engineers is again and again celebrated by Thomas Eakins in his work, whether in pictures like *The Gross Clinic* and *The Agnew Clinic*, where actual episodes of the life of the scientists and teachers are shown in dramatic fashion, or in portraits of the man whom the artist preferred to characterize as *The Thinker*. Always there is the sense of the constructor about this painting; and the strength of Eakins's art lies in the fullness with which his line follows the urge to mastery—physical or intellectual—of the men who incarnated the essential effort of his period. The youth who stands on the rock at the centre of *The Swimming Hole* is rendered with the energy of a Florentine; and in pose and buoyancy it contains more than a hint of the great *St. Christopher* of Pollaiuolo at the Metropolitan Museum. When one has perceived the quality, at once classical and yet contemporary, of the nude as represented by Thomas Eakins, one is better prepared to appreciate the splendid and dynamic balance attained in the portrait of Professor Leslie Miller. The realism of these pictures is their obvious feature, and has led some people to confuse the painter with those men who lose themselves in the maze of detail; but Eakins has the power to hold great masses in their essential and expressive directions even while painting wrinkles and hair, small reflections and exact textures.

The masculine character of his art concentrates on form as its medium. In the severity of his outlook, he is unconcerned with beauty of colour; while atmosphere and its unifying function, its drawing together of isolated objects into harmonious ensemble, had no interest for this mind that was for ever trying to penetrate to the thing and its meaning, independent of the enveloping air and the glamour of colour. . . .

Critics have at times tried to establish a likeness between Eakins and some of the great French artists of the nineteenth century; but I think the attempt is more misleading than helpful. Eakins has nothing of the classicism of Ingres, the link between Raphael and Renoir. Neither has his realism the quality of Courbet's; for the work of this rough mountaineer of the Jura who seemed in his time to trample underfoot the gracious wisdom of French art, appears today only as the expression of an aspect of the genius of his country which had lain dormant. The architecture of Courbet's canvases, their colour—almost as restrained as that of Eakins, but still of the French school—and his instinctive use of design even while labouring at the problems of sight, all mark him as of that country whose ancient culture is never, apparently, to be carried beyond its borders by visitors from other lands. . . .

It was to the school-teachers of French art that Thomas Eakins addressed himself, and then only for his technical training. Yet even though he continued their method without radical change, one feels that he is incomparably farther removed from the lifeless academism of the followers of Gérôme and Bonnat than he is from the other line of French artists who preserve the country's record of vital production. In reality, it is with neither group that we should identify him. The virtues of his works, as I have tried to show, are those of the life typified in his art, and the defects of the unsuccessful pictures are American defects. At times not even the powerful will of the man could lift him above the poverty and bleakness that are part of the American scene; and his painting is touched by the chill of it. At other times he seems to speculate on certain qualities of the old masters; and in reaching out for things that belonged to the opulence of the Venetians and the mystery of Rembrandt, his pictures show a certain confusion of purpose. Or perhaps, on the other hand, the intensity with which he fixes his eyes on form and character makes him forget that he is dividing his canvas into ungainly and ill-connected parts; a fault from which the instinct of an older culture would have saved him.

But the time has come when the sense of his limitations is dissipating, in our minds, through our grasp of his immense qualities. One jealously defends the autochthonic character of his art because one feels that we must have a solid native basis such as Thomas Eakins offers us, upon which we may build when we have mastered the European traditions we are slowly assimilating. With the passing of time, when Eakins seems as far away as Copley, our first great primitive, the figure of the old Philadelphian painter and teacher will take an ever higher place among American artists: his work, with its almost naive self-reliance and its deep, homely truth, will take on a profounder beauty even than that which we see in it to-day.

# Thomas Eakins, The Man

ALAN BURROUGHS, 1923

In discussing art one ordinarily overlooks the significance of the individual. One speaks in the abstract and compares artists merely by comparing their pictures. But sincere artists are first of all characters. Furthermore, though time and fashion alter our opinions about pictures, the artist's character once established after a formative period is not so easily changed. . . .

Thomas Eakins has not generally been recognized as an individual of importance in this connection—of great importance in any discussion of American art. Few have an adequate opinion of his work; few have any conception of his character, partly because of its modesty, partly on account of its extraordinary mixture of scientific and artistic qualities. But it seems inevitable that his personality will make itself known more fully with the lapse of time. One may judge so from the events of his life, laconically suggestive of strength and fixed values.

He was born July 25, 1844, the son of Benjamin and Caroline Cowperthwait Eakins, of English and Celtic stock. Benjamin Eakins was an old-fashioned writing master, one who engrossed manuscripts and lived a long, even life. The son inherited the father's deliberate ways. While still in high school he was known as an independent, thoughtful, but unobtrusive fellow. . . .

He painted especially hard during the decade between his return from abroad and his marriage to Susan H. Macdowell in 1881, turning out a great many pictures in spite of the fact that he worked slowly, methodically and with minute devotion to detail. He kept his vigorous health with sailing and shooting trips; for he was an enthusiastic sportsman, though a calm one in the face of excitement. In 1887, when he took a few months' trip in the West, he engaged in a strenuous outdoor existence with ease and rode horseback all the first day without showing a sign that he had not been on horseback for years.

In photography and in problems of perspective treated from a geometrical point of view, he showed the absorption of a man of consistent thought in the most tangible aspect of his chosen profession. And though he

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Alan Burroughs, "Thomas Eakins, The Man," *The Arts* 4 (December 1923): 302-23. Excerpts.

painted portraits constantly until well over sixty years of age, he gradually drifted toward a more complete interest in anatomy, making plaster casts and devoting much time to studies which were not appreciated but which (the artist hoped) would be of use to serious students who had not the time or the labor he himself had to give. . . .

Several anecdotes illustrate his dislike for biased conduct, for thoughtlessness, for social formulas. But these may not be taken without reserve, although the spirit of such anecdotes has value, and all aspects of his life indicate the same independence in regard to petty conventions. He did what was natural more often than what was expected. And he had to live, it must be remembered, in the extremely proper atmosphere of Philadelphia, where his class of girl students could not take turns posing for one another without some "talk" going about. One of his other classes was even "investigated." Though the investigation resulted in the reverse of scandal (and naturally so, since Eakins was, above everything else, honest in all his dealings). It reveals that there had been some doubt about the propriety of his methods. As a matter of fact, the little eddies in the Philadelphia current were the reaction against the Paris *atelier* system which Eakins brought back with him from abroad. The study of the nude is no longer an issue in the most exacting circles; and people will pass over these little items on our list with a smile.

Both as a scientist and as an artist Eakins was careless of side issues. But these two natures combined to form an absorbing interest in those things which did seem material to him. In a mathematician one expects thoroughness; in an artist, enthusiasm of a more sensitive sort. In a dissector of cadavers one does not expect much sentiment; nor much mental coldness in a painter of portraits. Yet from Eakins (who was both dissector and painter) came a capacity for exactness and research and logic that was genuinely tinged with sentiment and human understanding.

The history of *The Fairman Rogers Four in Hand* [A May Morning in the Park] reveals his thoroughness. He sketched the coach-and-four as it passed before him, probably on an exhibition run arranged by the owner. He made studies of the horses, not any horses, but the very horses which were used in this particular four-in-hand. He sketched a small portrait of Mrs. Rogers, dressed for a coach ride. And he made a study of a landscape in Fairmount Park for the background of his picture. Then he painted the brilliantly photographic and detailed "portrait" of the whole affair—brisk horses,

sparkling harness, polished coach, driver, footman, owner, guests and sunlit park. Yet the painting is not altogether mechanical. Rather it seems a very moving "human document," for it recreates as few single objects can do the "seventies" when it was finished.

He frequently explained his point of view toward art by saying some such phrase as "That's the way it looked." This, of course, is scientific in attitude. What he was diffident about expressing was the way he felt. But one cannot doubt that feeling entered into his work. Portraits of people in his family, little pictures like *Retrospection*, *Home Scene*, *Spinning* and the sensitive portrait of his father, *The Writing Master*, glow with a peaceful, natural sentiment—totally removed from science in the abstract, yet curiously thoughtful and exact in the actual working out. . . .

For other examples take the boxing pictures, of which Eakins finished three. *Billy Smith Between Rounds* [*Billy Smith (study)*], owned by Mr. Smith, was a step in the more ambitious work of painting the canvas called *Between Rounds*. Eakins followed the sport for a year before attempting the picture. He learned the boxing "game" as a serious-minded novelist would do before writing the story of a boxer. He saw everything and slighted nothing. The smoke from five thousand cigars and pipes dims the lights over the ring. The people of both audience and stage are painted from the life. To this same period belongs *Counting Out* [*Taking the Count*], an enormous canvas of life-size figures, for which he made two studies, that for the central figures and that for the referee's head. They are all portraits. What might seem strange to us, who today are so accustomed to movement in painting, Eakins did not try for the rapid action of actual boxing. Instead he found the less ostentatious movement of the whole scene, probably without being conscious of its importance to the new generation of more subjective painters. He probably did not think of it as drama, any more so than he would think of a man's face as drama. It would have been like him to seek only the inclusion of all the details and so to paint his boxers "between rounds" and during the pause of "counting out," when his eyes had most opportunity to rest on the scene. Nevertheless a feeling for the dramatic makes these pictures more than studies in vision. Notwithstanding meticulous and accurate sight, he in the end saw with his emotions too.

It seems strange to speak in this back-handed way of a quality which almost every good painter possesses. With Eakins' life in mind, it seems the only way. Remember that he looked with a cold eye; he was an ardent photographer in more ways than one. He became most interested when he had a problem in presentation—to get everything into a picture, to crowd his



canvases and yet keep details well spaced, to plant a chair firmly on the floor or to surround a figure by accessories. . . .

One of his students has recorded part of a talk Eakins gave on perspective, and Mrs. Eakins has some notes on his talks to classes through which one can get at Eakins' beliefs about art in another way. He is quoted as saying, "You can copy a thing to a certain limit, then you must use intellect." That tells a great deal. Though to him Art began with copying, it ended only after logic and knowledge had corrected first impressions. Again, he considered painting as a science. "All the sciences are done in a simple way; in mathematics the complicated things are reduced to simple things. So it is in painting. You reduce the whole thing to simple factors; you establish these and work out from them, pushing them toward one another. This will make strong work. The old masters worked this way." He held to constant things—things with weight and size, and things capable of being cross-sectioned. He believed in simple effects—that is in effects simply conceived—the kind of light, the time of day, the common facts of life. Exaggeration he considered a weakness, though less reprehensible than "common, ordinary work; respectability in art is appalling!" . . .

He more than once mentioned the belief that an artist's life was in his work. And in his own work his life, with all its depth and straightness, with its uncompromising loyalty to the mind, does appear with force. But his pictures alone may not be judged as readily as when considered in relation to his character. There is a certain coldness about them which does not immediately tempt one to look deeper. Looking deeper, of course, one feels the man behind them. But on the surface, which is finished so laboriously, shines a light not calculated to please, especially in portraiture. . . .

In the absence of sentimentality and much humor one guesses at a mild form of pessimism—the doubting of science. He seems to have had no faiths except that in the actuality of what confronted him. That was drama enough for him; he did not need to make either comedy or melodrama out of life in order to feel it. He distinguished the value of the more reserved and every-day details of existence from the more spectacular life of the imagination.

If one compares him to the leaders of the modern group, Eakins scarcely stands out as belonging to the generation of Monet, Renoir, or Cézanne. Yet he, the mathematically minded, drew his art from the same source which gave rise to these individuals. The difference is in method, they turning inward for stimulus, and he looking outward, toward reality. Because of this difference, the "moderns" have found something purer and more

restricted, something personal; while Eakins found Eastern America at the end of the nineteenth century—and found it not simple or personal, but complex and objective. They imagined; he illustrated. And his task on the face of it was enormously more difficult. Even when not as satisfactory as he would have had them, his results strike one as being immense.

Others have been realists in their own way. Corot in his early period was a realist more graciously, more sweetly. Courbet was more romantic. The Spaniards, having no such complexity to deal with in their seventeenth century, could do it more neatly; the Dutch with more conviviality and humor. But for steep, mountainous fact of accomplishment, Thomas Eakins' work stands by itself. Comparing him with realists, great and near-great, one sees immediately that though he lacks the elegance, the kindness, the lightness and "significance," which have at one time or another meant most in art, he was a most dignified and thoughtful painter; and he measured his half-century well by standards which have been considered lasting. He did not really need the elegance or the other qualities which he lacked in order to portray a period in which those qualities were either side-issues or assumed. What he did need he possessed—a capacity for hard work, keen sight and power. And how careless seem most other methods of approach in comparison to his!

# Thomas Eakins

FRANK JEWETT MATHER JR., 1930

Born in 1844, Thomas Eakins had about ten years' seniority over that group of Paris-trained painters which includes Beckwith, Brush, Cox, Blashfield, Sargent and Weir. And Eakins was also a good ten years younger than such pioneers as William Hunt and John La Farge. These chronological facts and the contented obscurity with which he lived out his life in his native Philadelphia have prevented Eakins from being considered with the group to which aesthetically he belongs, and of which he was unquestionably the greatest member. Thus, though a pioneer of the Paris style in America, he never received pioneer honors.

No anecdotalage enlivens Eakins's memory. That report of fellow students at Paris which makes young Sargent and young Weir still vivid is in Eakins's case entirely lacking. We know that for some years before 1870, after preliminary studies with Leutze and Schuessle at the Pennsylvania Academy, he studied with Gérôme at the École, and with Bonnat; that he was wandering in Spain during the Franco-Prussian war; that shortly after his return to Philadelphia he taught drawing and painting at the Academy, and when a venial and even humorous indiscretion ended this connection, he continued to teach in the Independent Art Students' League till within a few years of his death in 1916. We know that he studied anatomy profoundly. Everything about his work tells of the tenacious student and intrepid thinker. And the work also tells of certain masculine propensities. He loved the prize ring at its spectacular moments, the swish of the sweeps of a racing shell, the light swiftness of oversparred racing craft on quiet waters. So far as I know, he never painted a horse, but he was a horseman and modeled fine horses for great monuments at Trenton and Brooklyn. For the *décor* of the artist life he cared just nothing.

Great moments in painting, everything that we associate with Manet, Monet, and Cézanne, fell within his activity and observation, and we can only guess what he thought of them. His practice ignored these movements, changed little from his young manhood, and he never took the trouble to record his opinions, or possibly even to form them. One thinks, in contrast,

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Frank Jewett Mather Jr., "Thomas Eakins," *International Studio* 95 (January 1930): 44-49, 90-91; reprinted in his *Estimates in Art, Series II, Sixteen Essays on American Painters of the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1931), 201-31. Excerpts, 44-47, 49, 90-91.

of Thayer and Weir each painfully remaking a style, promptly repudiating the manner that served Eakins for a long life time. All this suggests a certain massiveness and immobility in Eakins, a certain narrowness, if you will, but it also shows wisdom and lucidity. In the way of style Eakins had from the first what he needed. As a portraitist and genre painter in that old tradition which delicately balances the claims of character with those of specific appearance he knew his strength to lie. The new problems were not his problems, and although a few colorful landscapes prove that he could have gone forward had he wished, the old conventions perfectly served his genius, and he held faithfully to them.

The style which for a life time sufficed for Eakins's talent, seems, barring a partial survival in portraiture, as dead as the dodo. Yet it is a style that took two or three centuries to produce, and it is still worth analysis. It may be assumed that the youth who passed from Schuessle's classes to Paris, about 1866, was already an able linear draughtsman and brought with him what Paris still regarded as the beginning of pictorial righteousness. At Paris the style of the Institute had already subdivided into a more linear and a more painter-like tradition. In the direct succession of the Empire style was *Gérôme*. He thought of everything in line, with color as a secondary grace. His ideals, naturally with personal modifications, passed to America in Kenyon Cox, George de Forest Brush, H. C. Walker, and Robert Vonnoh. Alongside the straight orthodoxy of *Gérôme*, there flourished a tolerated liberalism, with Bonnat as its prophet. From Couture down, the more liberal official painters, without breaking doctrinally with the Empire style, had been seeking a more flexible and painter-like practice. Essentially a painter spirit, Eakins naturally turned to Bonnat and the liberals. A few academies from the Paris days still preserved in the Eakins house, are like more supple Bonnats. Indeed, these studies have so much of the richness and discreet luminosity of Courbet's flesh painting that one must suppose Eakins perused the great heretic on the sly. This type of painting is so unduly discredited today that it needs a word of championship. It accepted a set of historical conventions which seem to me still sound. Everything being done in the studio, showed the generally reduced light and sharpened contrasts of indoors. Illumination was effected not by precise registration of closely allied tones but selected and strong contrasts of light and dark. This chiaroscuro was the means of creating form. The necessity of strong contrast tended to eliminate distracting hues and to base the palette on black and white. Great care was taken with the blacks and whites, which thus got a kind of color value. Frank

color was generally admitted only as a spot, a flash of red or gleam of blue justified by a costume or accessory. Something like this convention had served Rembrandt and the Dutch little masters. It was the sober manner, always competing with the equally conventional florid and colorful tradition of Rubens. To-day such pictures are shrugged off, by auctioneers and aesthetes, as “dark pictures,” which only means that it takes a certain amount of time and patience to read them, as it took time and patience to paint them. Of course there is no merit in painting dark or in painting bright. Either way, the best and the worst pictures have been made. But the painter who wishes to linger over his theme, facing it in many moods, enriching it from repeated observation and reflection, correcting and reshaping as he goes—such a painter will quite logically be a dark painter. To say what he has to say he must liberate himself from the inexorable tyranny of the fugitive appearance and from the perplexities of an ever shifting light. It is the conviction that Eakins’s dark pictures are paradoxically great which has retained him the respect of youth which dates the birth of art from Cézanne. And the more imaginative even see, that being what he was, a profound student of his fellow men, he could only adopt and retain the methods proper to the painstakingly intellectualized work of art.

Possibly Eakins was really at his greatest in genre painting, but since portraiture was his life work, we should begin with it. An Eakins portrait is very largely conceived, but without parade of handling; and very minutely detailed, but without any smallness. . . .

Generally Eakins’s sense of character is somewhat tragic. There are notable exceptions—the two concert singers (at the Pennsylvania Academy and at his house) in their full-throated vitality, the splendid lolling nudes in the *Bathing Pool* [*Swimming*], the lean athletes in the prize ring pictures, the brawny rowers, the noble nude woman in *The Spirit of the Schuylkill*. But in the main Eakins liked to paint and did paint men and women strong though ravaged by the years, somewhat warped and furrowed by much action and thinking. . . . [H]e preferred to read character in terms of effort and fortitude. This Spartan mood was repugnant if not mysterious to an age that eschewed the tragic, or tolerated it only if attenuated by an alien urbanity. It was the moment when *The Lady of Lyons* passed for high tragedy while *La Traviata* was a favorite opera. In such days the lucid bleakness of Eakins could not be liked, and when approved, was approved hesitatingly or coldly. He was a fine draughtsman, but a mediocre painter.

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Eakins was about twenty-eight when on his return from France he painted the rowing pictures. He sent back to his master Gérôme *John Biglin in a Single Scull*, retaining for himself a replica which is still in the Eakins's house. Both master and pupil had reason to be proud of the picture, for it is very plainly told, having, withal, an unaffected greatness. In a shell cut sharply at the ends by the frame the brawny form of the champion is arched forward ready for the catch, the wrists still dropped in feathering position. The nose of another shell just enters the picture from behind. Far beyond is the hazy farther bank of the Delaware, a shade lower than the rower's head. The dull blue expanse of river is troubled only by the long eddies from the last stroke, gently breaking the reflection of the figure and the shell, and by a couple of distant white sails. Everything is homely and specific, yet singularly grand. And this largeness of effect is chiefly due to the way in which the burly form, its heavy curves contrasting with the dominant horizontals, between two of which it is held, imposes itself against the vast level of the river. And the picture has in a high degree a grace then novel and only beginning to be talked about, an envelopment which catches the very feel of that sultry mist which hangs over the surface of our slow-running tidal rivers. Not greater but more charming is *The Pair-Oared Shell*, driven powerfully through the shadow of a massive lustrous bridge pier towards broken rapids and a nearby wooded shore. Here the distribution of broad masses of light and dark in a simple and noble geometrical arrangement is both lovely and impressive.

Of 1874, Eakins's thirty-first year, is the portrait of Professor Benjamin H. Rand. . . . It is as much a magnified genre picture as a portrait, . . . and already we discern the formula upon which the later genre pictures were to be built, a carefully chosen form strongly illuminated in the foreground amid barely penetrable obscurity. Upon a similar principle of contrast are constructed such masterpieces as *The Zither Player*, *The Chess Players*, *The Home Ranch*, the two versions of *The Spirit of the Schuylkill*, the two prize ring pictures. It was the formula that had earlier served Caravaggio, young Vélasquez, Rembrandt and Terborch. For that genre painting which seeks rather intensity of character than kaleidoscopic variety of appearances the convention seems permanently valid.

Of the pictures painted in this convention *Salutat* is the more thrilling and *The Spirit of the Schuylkill* the more charming and satisfying. In the former, the prize ring picture, the firm body of the champion tingles from the toe barely touching the floor to the upraised right hand, the homely and entirely natural poses of the towel-man and sponge-holder behind

are of singular nobility, the background of applauding sportsmen, including portraits of Eakins and his friends, though seen in half-light is admirably realized, but there is a baffling lack of unity. Perhaps it is as simple as that the two secondary figures are more interesting than the main figure, or that there is too much light behind the boxer. In short, one is inclined to believe that the picture would have been better had there been a greater sacrifice of naturalism to the convention.

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No review of the other genre pictures is possible. . . . Let us pass rather to the masterpiece of them all, *The Swimming Pool* [*Swimming*]. The subject is nothing but six naked men and boys on or about a rude stone pier which juts out before a grove, with a glimpse upstream to a rising meadow, closed by woods, which cut off all but a patch of sky. The pyramidal group is as formally composed as any Renaissance picture, with contrast of forms tensely erect or lolling and relaxed, with lovely connecting gestures, everything studied and complete. But, by a singular grace, nothing is farfetched or forced. Every pose, every gesture is what might be seen. By a happy chance any confused group of bathing men might fall into this monumental order without any one dropping a hand or turning a head. The ingredients are casual and natural, the whole stately and monumental. Of the principle of discovering beauty by selective observation of mere appearances there could be no finer example than is seen here.

Thomas Eakins's genius was that of the observer and discoverer. His aim was accuracy and truthfulness, his habit a self-effacement which was proud or humble, as you choose to look at it, but in any case rested on a devout acceptance of the thing seen. His art then consisted in study and a delicate probity. The personal transformation, which every good artist makes, was in his case confined to well pondered omissions and discreet emphasis of the residual vision, in a very creative act of taste. This same inherent taste and culture saved him from the lure of unfit novelties, kept him from restless experimentation, led him surely to such established conventions as were akin to his thinking and feeling. Thus there is a massive and appealing wisdom in all his work, a value of interpretation which time will not efface. Amid the whirlwind that during his activity stirred the art of painting to its depths he held his tiller true. No painter of his time better deserves Leonardo's praise for that artist whose judgment surpasses his mere dexterity. The time abounded in painters whose dexterity surpassed their judgment. Most of them are already forgotten while Eakins's fame, which has never yet received its due celebration, mounts steadily.

# Thomas Eakins

LLOYD GOODRICH, 1930

Thomas Eakins was the most consistent, thorough-going and complete realist among the American painters of the last generation. His work, having little romance or picturesqueness of subject, or charm and grace of style, has never attained the popularity of many of his contemporaries. His hard-working, uneventful life, passed almost entirely in his native city of Philadelphia, was not calculated to furnish colorful material for biographers; as he himself said: "For the public I believe my life is all in my work." But the austere power of his art is making itself felt more and more as the years pass.

Temperamentally Eakins presented an unusual combination of artistic and scientific qualities. Endowed with intellectual powers of a high order, and living in an epoch when science was the new religion, and in a city which has always had a reputation for scientific eminence, it was natural that he should turn toward the pursuit of scientific truth. The circles in which he moved were as much scientific as artistic; in his portraits the figures of physicians, surgeons, and professors appear more often than any other types. There was much of the scientific spirit in his absorption in problems of anatomy and perspective, in the thoroughness and patience with which he assembled his data, in the completeness of his technique, and in the logic that governed the construction of his works.

His attitude toward his subjects also had something of the impersonality of science. He had the scientist's gift of observing life from an objective viewpoint, never sentimentalizing over the individual actors but presenting the scene as a whole without comment. This remarkable impartiality, however, is not to be confused with absence of emotion. The hand that guided the brush was as steady as the hand that guides the scalpel in *The Gross Clinic*, but there was no lack of human sympathy—not, however, the faint-hearted sympathy that hides its eyes and shrinks from the less pleasant aspects of life, but the robust sympathy of the scientist who can look on disease and pain without flinching and describe them truthfully. Profound humanity and intense emotion underlay all his work, but they expressed themselves not in any merely subjective emotionalizing but in the creation of a powerful

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Lloyd Goodrich, "Thomas Eakins," in *Sixth Loan Exhibition: Winslow Homer, Albert P. Ryder, Thomas Eakins* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1930), 16–20. © 1930 The Museum of Modern Art, New York.



objective record of things as he saw them. The richness of his emotional nature is to be measured not by his expression of his own ego but by the completeness, vitality, and profundity of the image of life which he created.

With all his scientific leanings, Eakins was thoroughly an artist. Although he does not seem to have been much concerned with purely aesthetic qualities, they nevertheless manifested themselves inevitably and perhaps unconsciously in everything he did. Such were his innate qualities of mind and character that every one of his pictures, from the very beginning, had aesthetic virtues of a high order. His work possessed instinctive qualities that seem to transcend our ordinary artistic standards—certainly the narrow limits of present-day aesthetics; it makes one believe that the greatest aesthetic significance may often be a by-product of the search for other properties.

Eakins represents a completeness of adjustment to his environment rare among American artists of his generation. Too many of his fellows, returning from Europe, found America hard and ugly, and took refuge in romanticized reminiscences of the more gracious life abroad, with the inevitable weakening that such fantasies produce. But Eakins submerged himself deeply in his environment and succeeded in extracting from it the raw material of art. Something tonic and vigorous in it must have answered the masculine vigor of his own personality. Such a whole-hearted acceptance indicates a strong-mindedness, almost a ruthlessness, which few artists of his time possessed. Ryder painted an inner reality; Winslow Homer sought out the most picturesque and stirring aspects of the outdoor world; but Eakins took the environment of the average middle-class city-dweller of his day and, without sentimentalizing or distortion, created art from it.

Few painters have mirrored an environment with such fidelity. His work could have been painted in no other time and place than in the United States from 1870 to 1910, and more particularly in Philadelphia, with its conservatism, its quiet, solid, rich respectability—so different from the ostentatious spectacularity of New York—its tradition of science and medicine, its material massiveness, its pleasant, healthy outdoor life on the Schuylkill and in the surrounding countryside, its distinctly older American character as opposed to the foreign ferment of Manhattan, its air of a more settled, compact, and homogeneous community. It was an epoch to which we of this day are inclined to look back with a certain condescending irony, and indeed certain of its aspects were forbidding enough—the dark rooms, the heavy, ugly furniture, the sombre, prosaic clothes, the general grimly utilitarian

atmosphere—but Eakins evidently found it satisfying enough, for he was able to transmute it into art which was rich and strong—a measure of his own inner strength and richness. An integral part of this environment, living its life, he painted the people and things that were closest to him, so that his work had always an undercurrent of intense personal emotion; and at the same time he saw his surroundings with such clear eyes and such a steady mind that his pictures were deeply revealing—sometimes devastatingly so. Without any intentional satire, he portrayed his environment with an entire honesty and a single-hearted devotion to the truth that were far more mordant.

As a portrait painter Eakins's concern was above all with character. His sitters were seldom possessed of any high degree of ideal beauty or brilliancy, being usually more or less matter-of-fact, hard-working people—doctors, lawyers, professors, business men, and their wives—with little of the attraction of youth, but plenty of the strength of maturity and experience. These people, most of them his friends and neighbors, Eakins saw and painted with complete candor, with no attempt to flatter, to soften over-prominent features, to iron out grim, uncompromising saliency of character. His vision of them was austere, stripping them of all glamour, of all extraneous pomp and circumstance, of anything that might disguise their essential selves. His art had an element in it like a powerful acid which ate away the sham, the pretence, the illusion, and left only the irreducible nucleus of personality. This psychological penetration was never as obvious as caricature, but for that reason all the more intense. And yet his portraits were profoundly human. One never feels that his sitters are merely the polite, stylishly dressed shells of people, as in so many of Sargent's portraits, but flesh and blood and bone, in all their commonplaceness, their limitations, their fundamental humanness. They are real; they exist. . . .

On the surface Eakins's work is apt to deceive the superficial observer into thinking that he was only one more of the host of competent academic painters of the last generation whose pictures are now so lamentably out of style. But there were fundamental differences. He was never academic. The essence of academicism is conformity, standardization, the manufacture of easy formulas for the use of mediocre talents; but Eakins's art was innocent of formulas and entirely personal. A pupil of the *Ecole des Beaux-Arts* under Gérôme and Bonnat, he presents the unusual spectacle of a genuinely original artist developing out of one of the most frigid official schools in the history of painting. From the very first his work had a reality and vitality that his masters lacked. In contrast with their cold, external

naturalism, his creative kind of realism seems closer to Courbet than to any other French painter of the time, although of a more austere, restrained and intense character, without the Frenchman's exuberant animalism or romanticism.

It is almost impossible to trace any direct influences in his work. A trip to Spain in his youth introduced him to Ribera and Vélasquez; and he must certainly have admired Rembrandt. But all these were not so much influences as temperamental coincidences. Never one to borrow, he developed as independently as an oak in a clearing. From the spell of the passing movements of his day he was entirely free. Impressionism came and went and left no trace on him. He remained throughout his life at once an individualist and a traditionalist; one more example of the fact that the strongest American artists have worked out their destinies independent of current movements abroad.

His development was a singularly logical, consistent one. From the meticulous *genre* pictures of his youth to the maturer portraits of his later years, it was a steady process of ripening, gaining in breadth and mastery. He found himself early; *The Gross Clinic* was painted when he was only thirty-one. His power was a natural, unforced one, manifesting itself from the very beginning. Even in the first work that he painted after his return from abroad—those scenes of hunting, rowing and boating which constitute such authentic documents of American sporting life in the '70s, furnishing illuminating comparisons with Winslow Homer's paintings of similar subjects—the individual and racial character is unmistakable. Although possessing all the technical skill that he had acquired in the Paris studios, they showed a fidelity to their virgin subject-matter, a freedom from mannerism, an essential innocence of vision, that were altogether his own. They prove him to have been above all a student of nature, creating art out of the actual unvarnished material of the visible world, with no memories of other men's styles coming between him and the subject. As angular and hard and uncompromising as photographs, they had a warmth, a severe simplicity, a distinction that no camera could give. Direct out of life, they still achieved that genuine style that is the inevitable result of a mind of strength and integrity telling the truth about things as it sees them.

This quality of first-hand, independent vision, this extraordinarily close contact and harmony with reality, remained with him throughout his life. Few artists have seen the external world with such clear-sightedness or intensity, or realized it in their work with such completeness. But Eakins's

realism was never a matter of the surface. His painting shows no trace of the attempt to capture superficial appearances that preoccupied most of his generation. His portraits differed fundamentally from the brilliant shadow-painting of Sargent, Chase, and Duveneck, masters of surface naturalism and of the flowing brush. He did not merely paint the illusory aspects of things, as they did, but created a world of ponderable forces. His concern was always with the deepest properties of reality. His work had formal qualities—depth, volume, solidity, weight—such as could be found in only a few painters of his day in any country. The physical existence of his pictures is tremendous; they have a quality of strength and permanence that places him among the few masters of plastic form of his time.

Every element in his pictures was thoroughly understood, firmly constructed, fully realized. He was incapable of painting a lazy, vague, or meaningless passage. His forms were modeled with the precision, firmness, and saliency of a sculptor; they give forth a sense of spare muscularity, of inner vitality, of being sound and living to the core. The largeness and amplitude with which they were conceived endow them with a quality of genuine monumentality. The austerity of Eakins's nature led him to omit everything superfluous, but there was no hint of weakness in this asceticism; rather his power gained in intensity from being stripped to its bare essentials. The result of this severe discipline was style in the least superficial, most fundamental sense of that much-abused word.

During his lifetime Eakins received the modest amount of academic recognition that comes to a good workman, but the larger qualities of his art seem to have remained almost entirely unrecognized. One has only to turn to the writings of the older generation of critics to see how little his essential originality was appreciated, and how on the other hand his lack of grace and smartness was held against him. Most of his contemporaries thought of him as a sincere and entirely sound but awkward, uningratiating, prosaic painter; they failed to perceive his great formal strength. But now that the tide of impressionism has ebbed and its frothy waves subsided, the art of Eakins stands out like a rock. Now that we no longer value surface naturalism as the last generation did, but look for deeper structural qualities; now that we demand clarity and precision, and mistrust the vague and sentimental; now that we aspire toward a more masculine and architectonic art, we have rediscovered Eakins.

This does not mean that his art is not basically opposed to the more superficial tendencies of modern art, as to those of his own day. There was no trace in it of mere decoration, mannerism, or the restless search for novelties, that mark so much painting today. We are witnessing an orgy of subjectivism, but Eakins's art was severely objective. A large section of modernism is fanatically opposed to what it calls "representational" painting, but Eakins's work was entirely representational. Any trace of "literature" is frowned upon by proponents of "pure" painting, but Eakins's art was a record of his times. But although to the narrow dogmatist he may seem deplorably unaesthetic, those who can see the essential aesthetic qualities beneath the differing surfaces, will recognize his profound affinity to the deepest currents of contemporary art. For those to whom painting is not merely pretty decoration or an amusing intellectual game, but the expression of life and experience, the art of Eakins is a permanently vital element of our tradition.

# A Note on Thomas Eakins

JOHN ROTHENSTEIN, 1930

It is natural that in a new country creation should absorb the energies of the ablest and criticism play a minor part. The American antipathy towards criticism is at once a source of strength and of weakness: strength in that it acts as a check on the pedantry that stifles original creation, weakness because it encourages the acceptance of low standards. Whatever the final effect of this attitude on the making of artists in America, one thing is certain: so long as it persists their reputations will continue to be made in Europe. As a matter of fact it is unlikely to persist for long, for on the Atlantic coast is a society on its way to becoming as stable as any in Europe, and in a stable society, with achievements behind it, the voice of criticism is wont to speak with authority.

In the past, however, American painters with European reputations have been exalted by their own countrymen rather to the detriment of those who have stayed at home or exhibited little or not at all abroad.

This is not to say that there have been many American painters comparable to Gilbert Stuart, Benjamin West, Whistler, Sargent. But there have been, on the other hand, several whose achievements are not sufficiently recognized. Chief among these are Thomas Eakins and Albert Pinkham Ryder. . . . Readers of Walter Pach's "Ananias" may be curious to know more of Eakins, who, in that violent work, was contrasted with Sargent as the true artist over against the false. The critics have been less kind to him than to Ryder, and there are throughout the United States many to whom the most obscure of continental cubists is better known than he. In his native Philadelphia alone is his memory green.

To tell the truth he is an artist not difficult to neglect. Those elements in his painting most likely to arrest attention are the least admirable. Compared with the canvases, small in size, but not moving in their poetic splendour and breadth of vision, of his contemporary Ryder, Eakins's appear commonplace enough. In a sense they are commonplace. In them neither unique vision, nor transcendent skill, nor great vitality is manifest, although, strangely enough, it is for vitality that he has most often been praised. The good qualities in them exist more abundantly in the work of other artists. But

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John Rothenstein, "A Note on Thomas Eakins," *Artwork: The International Quarterly of Arts and Crafts* (London) 6 (Autumn 1930): 196-99. Excerpt, 196, 199.

the union, very evident in everything he painted, of certain particular excellences, gives his work a character that raises it at times immeasurably above the commonplace.

The chief subject of his art was man's activity at work and play. What therefore delighted him most were surgeons at their operating tables, scientists among their instruments, boxers entering the ring, negroes dancing, oarsmen in their boats, and the adventurous life of the early settlers.

All this he portrayed in a realistic manner. To have delighted thus in the life about him, when the majority of his contemporaries were primly pursuing shadows of shadows, was a sign of original creative impulse. And yet, looking at these canvases of his, so vigorous in subject and so realistic in handling, one cannot but wonder whether in either choice of subject or method of handling he was being entirely true to his own vision or his own talents. One has only to recall Courbet to realize how little in comparison actual shapes, textures, and weights of ordinary things mattered to Eakins. Courbet worshipped them for their own sakes, but something either inherent in himself or the puritanism of his environment caused the American to view them, as it were, at a distance. Frank acceptance of material things exactly as they are, and a delight in them, are contrary to the whole puritan tradition, which played an important part in the formation of his character as an artist. Thus at first sight only does his painting appear realistic, and closer inspection will show a persistent leaning towards idealization. So strong does this tendency seem to me that I cannot but feel his spirit to have been at bottom akin to Watt's rather than Courbet's. In a word he was suited by temperament neither to energetic everyday subject matter nor realistic treatment. His was fundamentally the classic nature, and it is difficult to believe that he would not have fulfilled himself more completely had circumstances led him, as they did an Ingres or a David, to ideal subjects.

As it is, Eakins's fine sensibility and humanity, coupled with his excellent craftsmanship, have resulted in a panorama of contemporary life of a profoundly impressive character. Something of the grave and sterling nature of the artist is manifest in all his works. Everything about them inspires respect, save from time to time his lighting, when he tends to illuminate the central figure in a composition in a manner unsuited to the realistic presentation at which he aimed. . . .

The effect created by these works, so grave and detached in spirit, and so sound in execution, was widespread rather than enduring; for already one of the most considerable of American painters has dwindled into a disregarded classic.

# The Brown Decades: Art

LEWIS MUMFORD, 1931

Until the Civil War, art in the United States had not escaped the leading-strings of colonialism. The folk-arts, like weaving, had had an independent life in the country districts; and in the design of clipper ships and certain kinds of machinery and tools, the American had achieved "that equilibrium of lines, proportions, and masses which are among the fundamental causes of abstract beauty," but painting and sculpture gave no signs of an indigenous life: these arts had been transplanted, but they had not yet taken root.

In the slightly more genial atmosphere after the Civil War, aided by the general decay of puritanism and quickened by contacts with Paris, Düsseldorf, and Munich, the arts underwent a swift transformation, and almost for the first time in the nineteenth century America produced paintings which could be mentioned in the same breath as the literature that had flourished from Cooper to Whitman. A group of authentic talents appeared whom one sets in retrospect about two major figures, Thomas Eakins and Albert Pinkham Ryder. . . . With Eakins one must group that excellent landscape painter Homer Martin, the versatile and eclectic decorator John La Farge, the illustrator Winslow Homer, and above all, Mary Cassatt, whose long Parisian associations gave her the fresh palette that is absent from Ryder and Eakins, whilst she maintained what was usually missing in the Americans who were won over to impressionism and the "open air."

Whistler falls in between Ryder and Eakins, poorer in imagination than one, unable to compensate by his charm and facility and cosmopolitan knowledge for the austere strength of the other; while Sargent remained to the end the illustrator, who had the misfortune to choose a permanent medium, like the walls of the Boston Public Library or the ceilings of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts for graphic conceptions that had no real pictorial depth or lasting power. The most adroit appearance of workmanship, the most dashing eye for effect cannot conceal the essential emptiness of Sargent's mind, or the contemptuous and cynical superficiality of a good part of his execution: the best one can say of his portraits of fashionable gentlemen and ladies is that they matched the depth of their subjects.

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Lewis Mumford, "The Brown Decades: Art," *Scribner's Magazine* 90 (October 1931): 361-72; reprinted as Chapter 4: "Images-Sacred and Profane," in his ***The Brown Decades: A Study of the Arts in America, 1865-1895*** (1931; 2nd rev. ed., New York: Dover Publications, 1955). Excerpts. Reprinted by permission of the Gina Maccoby Literary Agency. Copyright © 1931, renewed 1959 by Elizabeth M. Morss and James Morss.



This grouping of the painters of the Brown Decades was not, one need hardly explain, the contemporary one; indeed, it is only during the last ten years that criticism has reduced the overblown reputations of that period and fixed a proper value on the obscurer talents; but as the years go on, the overwhelming importance of Ryder and Eakins becomes more and more indisputable. When Auguste Rodin said of the art of the Brown Decades, "America has had a Renaissance, but America doesn't know it," he was not far from the truth. . . .

## II

Outside the meagre province of the decorative arts, there had been two forms of genuinely popular art in America: one was the portrait, and the other was the illustrative print. . . .

The tradition of the itinerant portrait painter underwent a metamorphosis in the career of one of the last of them, George Fuller, while that of the colloquial illustrator reached its culmination in the more mature and competent draughtsmanship of Winslow Homer. In these two men one stands before the bridge which unites the older tradition of American art with that which emerged during the Brown Decades. . . .

## III

. . .

Homer's real significance for American art did not lie in the quality of his painting nor even in his queer personal integrity: it lay in the fact that he embraced the life about him and made what he could of it—the coast, the sea, the weather-bitten faces, all the homely decencies, heroisms, tensions, defeats. His visit to Paris in 1867, or to England in 1881-1882, or to the islands of the American tropics in later years, all had their effects upon him; but neither they, nor his growing popularity in the New York galleries could shake his proud, stern provincialism.

With Homer, American illustration reached a temporary climax and then passed over into photography—passed over to it, notably, in his own paintings. . . .

## IV

We now pass to a talent of higher order and superior grasp: Thomas Eakins. He was born in Philadelphia in 1844, and after beginning the study of art in his native city, he went to Paris in 1866 and placed himself in the studios of Bonnat and Gérôme, while he took special lessons from the sculptor,

Dumont. Eakins's interest in sculpture and his later study of anatomy at Jefferson Medical College are important to remember in understanding his art: his realism has nothing to do with the fashionable impressionist photography of the period: it had its source in the conception of every object as a three-dimensional solid whose surfaces must be understood in terms of expressible content and function, not superficially rendered as light and shade.

Eakins's visit to Spain, during the Franco-Prussian War, doubtless brought him into contact with Vélasquez; indeed, one would suspect Vélasquez and Rembrandt as direct influences from a study of his major portraits; but beyond his immediate esthetic heritage, Eakins was open to all the new forces at work in his century, and he had that infinite curiosity and patience and exacting sense of workmanship which was common to its technicians and scientists. . . . Eakins was in fact the mirror of his period, the object mirrored, and the esthetic expression that resolves these terms.

The life of this man was quiet and obscure: it had, apparently, no inner need for dramatic displays and compensations, not even surreptitious ones. He taught art and anatomy from 1873 on; he painted numerous portraits and hoped to be paid money for them, although his disconcerted patrons, unpleased by his relentless honesty, often left the canvases in his studio. Though as early as 1879 a writer in *Harper's Monthly* mentioned Eakins along with Mary Cassatt as a painter of great promise, and though prizes and medals came to him occasionally all through his life, his house, when he died in 1916, was filled with unsold canvases; and it needed his death, and a retrospective exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum, to make our critics begin to realize the strength and integrity of Eakins, one of the two or three American artists who rank with the best painters of his period in Europe, in solid achievement, if not in the power of innovation.

Eakins's life has still to be told in detail; but the number of anecdotes about him is increasing daily. He had an intense interest in science: one of his big canvases, done shortly after returning to America, is that of the *Gross Clinic*, which depicts a great old-fashioned surgeon, expounding the principles of a pre-Listerian operation. The unflinching butchery of the surgeon, the abstract calculations of the physicist, the tense, dry, somewhat bleak faces of the scientific men of his period, crystallized once for all in his portrait of *The Thinker*—these instruments and attitudes attracted Eakins, and he interpreted them from the inside. . . .

Along with Eakins's respect for science went a hearty contempt for the hierarchies of caste and office, a feeling characteristically echoed by

Thorstein Veblen's *Theory of the Leisure Class*, which, published in 1898, belongs to the period of Eakins's maturity. Commissioned by the Union League Club of Philadelphia to do a portrait of President Hayes, Eakins seized his one opportunity with the President to capture him working in his shirt-sleeves. The horrified committee consigned the portrait to limbo; and, I understand, it has never been found.

Naturally Eakins would sometimes be one of the group that would have dinner with Walt Whitman in Camden on Sundays; for his work was in one sense a carrying into the graphic arts of those principles which Whitman had announced in his preface to the *Leaves of Grass*, and expanded in his *Democratic Vistas* in 1870: science, democracy, plain men and women, the sacredness of the every-day fact, the miracle of the humblest object or the most unlettered man—in these interests Eakins plainly shared. If Eakins rescued his art from the superficialities of the photographic painter, he rescued it also from the weak dramatic symbolism of an Elihu Vedder, the adolescent sweetness of a Fuller, or the mere illustration of a Homer: above all, he made it face the rough and brutal and ugly facts of our civilization, determined that its values should grow out of these things and should not look for its themes to the historic symbols of Europe. But there is in Eakins's work no false idealization of labor and brawn: Eakins respected the workers too much to pay them that inverted compliment. On the contrary, the sensitive, intellectualized, acute, anxious faces of the scholars and scientists of the period dominate Eakins's gallery: he knew that the toughest and most stubborn encounter with reality might lie behind a mathematical equation.

"I never knew of but one artist, and that's Tom Eakins," said Walt Whitman, "who could resist the temptation to see what they think they ought to rather than what is"; and again, speaking in defense of Eakins's slightly leering portrait of himself, with the ruddy, hale, bibulous Franz Hals touch in it, Whitman said: "We must remember that Eakins's picture is severe—keeps close to nature—slurs nothing—faces the worst as well as the best." Here was just the quality that was lacking in the literature of the Brown Decades, in the novels of Howells as well as in its lesser manifestations. But no degree of refinement or sensitiveness was beyond Eakins's reach: his portrait of the Señora Gomez or that of Arthur B. Frost discloses every phase of the inner drama. Eakins had a singular capacity of doing justice to his subject: he had no temptation to make his thinkers brawny or his prize-fighters and oarsmen intellectual: he could meet them all on their own ground, and find in each subject his peculiar strength.

Eakins's father was an old-fashioned writing master, and Eakins had the integrity of that careful workmanship, if not its meaningless flourishes. With all his tough masculine interests, and for all his love of sailing, horse-back-riding, duck-shooting, he was at his best, not in landscape, but in portrait painting. The backgrounds of these portraits are frequently empty; if they are painted at all, they are thin and unsatisfactory; but the weakness is the result only of the intensity and stress that have gone into the figure itself. Some of the unfinished portraits, incidentally, are superb in their own right, being finished in every sense at the moment that Eakins withdrew from them, although parts of the canvas might be left blank.

A salty directness, an absence of pretense and sham, is present in all of Thomas Eakins's work. "All the sciences," he said, "are done in a simple way; in mathematics the complicated things are reduced to the simple things. So it is in painting. You reduce the whole thing to simple factors; you establish these and work out from them, pushing them toward one another. This will make strong work. The old masters worked this way." Such words as these make one realize Whitman's wisdom when he said: "Eakins is not a painter, he is a force." Working in obscurity during the Brown Decades, though always drinking from the sources of contemporary life, Eakins, like his contemporary in philosophy, Charles Peirce, now enters American culture both as a painter and a force. He stood outside the fashionable currents: the high-keyed palette, the slashing brush mark, as in Homer and Sargent, the refined and "beautiful" subject, as with Dewing, Tarbell, Brush, or the sunny impressionism of Childe Hassam and Alden Weir, all these various symbols of popular success Eakins spurned. He never got nearer the colors of a sunny summer landscape than did Courbet; indeed, for all his color indicated, he might have been painting in the Netherlands of the seventeenth century.

No matter: the Brown Decades are as far away from us now as the seventeenth century, and a world built up on the dull side of the palette, a world of slates and muds, became familiar to us less than two decades ago, in the paintings of Picasso, Braque, Derain, Duchamp. We are no longer deceived into believing that there is any ultimate rightness in the selection of colors on some scientific basis: it is not nature, but the mind of man, which establishes the esthetic worth of a certain color scale, or set of tonal values; and if Eakins did not choose to experiment with the palette of the open-air

school, that was his own business: so long as his health did not suffer, his practice casts no reflection upon his art. Eakins avoided most of the pitfalls that were in the path of the American painter in the Brown Decades. He showed that, with a little talent and a little tenacity of purpose, provided one had no care for popular appreciation and immediate success, works of art could be created, even in a materialistic country that denied the value of an art unauthenticated by the efforts of brokers and auction rooms. To-day the assured place of Thomas Eakins taunts the hasty efforts of those contemporaries who aimed at lesser goals.

# An Early Painting by Thomas Eakins

BRYSON BURROUGHS, 1934

A newly acquired picture by Thomas Eakins, *Max Schmitt in a Single Scull* [*The Champion Single Sculls*], is to be seen this month in the Room of Recent Accessions. This is the third highly notable addition lately made to the collection of American paintings, the others being the *Delaware Water Gap* by Inness, bought last year, and *Moonlight-Marine* by Ryder, bought last April. All are capital examples of our native painting at its most admirable and raciest point of development.

The nationality of each of these works is unmistakable, but the bonds of relationship between them, particularly between the Ryder and the others, are hard to define—are felt indeed rather than reasoned. Inness chooses a famous show place, beloved of sight-seers, as his theme and embellishes it with a passing shower, sudden sunlight and a rainbow, and enlivenments like a steaming railroad train, rafts on the river, cattle, and people. Ryder, austere and visionary, paints a moonlight night with ominous rolling clouds and a little boat lurching in the waves which appeals to the sympathetic onlooker as an abstract of all moonlit nights at sea. Eakins goes to his back yard, so to speak, and utilizes his youthful eyesight of binocular clarity, his already unusual scientific knowledge of perspective and optics, and his marvelously precise craftsmanship to make a straightforward copy of a homely scene in a familiar aspect, with all its items detailed impartially.

As the title states, the picture is, ostensibly at least, a portrait. Eakins's boyhood friend Max Schmitt, an athlete and oarsman of local celebrity, is shown in his racing shell Josie on the Schuylkill River at Philadelphia, the precise spot being above the Girard Avenue bridge and the time a sunny autumn afternoon. The work is signed with a remarkable and inimitable signature—a miniature portrait of the artist himself, seen rowing at good speed and in excellent form (he too was a trained oarsman) in the middle distance. On the stern of his boat appear the name EAKINS and the date 1871.

He was then twenty-seven. He had returned from his studies in Europe the year before, imbued with the principles and criticisms of Gérôme, his teacher at the École des Beaux-Arts, and was living with his parents in Philadelphia. He had come back well equipped and skillful, but not more so,

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Bryson Burroughs, "An Early Painting by Thomas Eakins," *Bulletin of the Metropolitan Museum of Art* 29 (September 1934): 145, 151-53.

noticeably, than other talented students just out of pupilage. During his first year at home, however, an extraordinary advance in his powers took place. In personality and in craftsmanship he had become a full-fledged painter with a clearly marked style—the style he was to follow throughout his whole career. At the age when most young artists are floundering among experiments he produced works which we consider among his most characteristic achievements.

Our picture is one of these and perhaps the earliest in date. We look upon Eakins as an exceptionally impersonal painter who effectively hid his own emotions in the dispassionate presentation of facts; from his letters and his recorded sayings he would seem to have considered such a program as proper for artists. But in this picture of his friend and himself rowing on the Schuylkill the painter's joy in the sport and everything connected with it, his own love of the place and the hot afternoon, are unmistakably evident. Through the picture we can see the painter himself, sturdy, downright, scientifically inclined, and he appears as a most admirable and dependable young man. Boats were of absorbing interest to him—he painted their portraits with the same care for construction and anatomy that he gave to Max Schmitt and himself; so were the ripples made by oars dragging on the surface of the calm water; and so were the dark spots left by the contact of cleanly dipped, rhythmical oars, where the reflection of the sky on the water is momentarily disturbed. He was curious about the exact form of reflections in the water and their perspective—about all perspective in fact. The bridge with its ugly, intricate ironwork he found worthy of his most careful attention (doubtlessly figuring out in his practical way the constructive logic of its girders and braces), and he noted that on a windless day the steam from a tugboat rises vertically; that a swiftly moving boat would frighten ducks and make them frantic. Not one of the numberless details of the picture but has been conformed to logic of time and place. His minute application has extended to every inch of the canvas without in any degree lessening the large effect of the whole scene.

Later on in life the artist became austere and concentrated, as is fitting in an older person, and also much more severe in color. Our newly acquired picture is the brightest of all Eakins's oil paintings as I recall them. Later works by him are greater in conception, no doubt, and more masterly. One would not compare it to *The Writing Master*, *The Thinker*, *The Lady with a Setter Dog*, or the *Signora d'Arza* (to select only from our collection), but the variety and lustiness of this youthful work give it a particular and perhaps more general appeal.





## 4. Canonizing the Master, 1941-1982

Now deemed one of the three iconic masters of American nineteenth-century painting, Eakins held a position that was further solidified as American art came of age and became an independent area for collecting and an academic discipline. Eakins literature increased as never before. It also grew in depth of scholarship as professionals entered in the field; museum curators as well as university professors turned their insights toward the understanding of Eakins. Whereas museum curators were object oriented, learning about Eakins by analyzing individual works of art and his methodological approach, academics brought broader perspectives to their investigations.

With the increase in research, the very nature of writing about Eakins was transformed as footnotes and bibliographic references substantiated newly discovered facts and were used to defend multiple interpretations. Professional jargon also began to appear, but the writing style was still accessible to the educated reader and art enthusiast as well as college students and academics. By the end of this era, Eakins was studied not only by historians of American art but also by American cultural studies experts and historians of French art, each bringing different concerns to their research and interpretations.

Dramatic changes in American society, in particular those wrought by the Civil Rights Movement, further affected readings of the artist. American Studies scholars perceive of the arts as part of an interrelated dynamic between politics, society, and culture; Eakins studies responded with two new foci: race and sports. In a seminal essay on the image of the black in Eakins's and Homer's art, Sidney Kaplan viewed Eakins as a humanist, sensitive to "the racial tragedy" of the United States. And the first article solely on one aspect of Eakins's sporting paintings, the boxing images, appeared. The most dramatic change occurred, however, when historians began ignoring the Yankee myth and considered how Eakins was influenced by and interacted with European art movements. Despite these varied historical concerns, the writers for the most part continued to be celebratory and nativist in attitude.

# ***American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman***

F.O. MATTHIESSEN, 1941

In so far as the effects of one art can approach those of another, Eakins is most like Whitman in *The Swimming Hole* [*Swimming*], where one of his favorite relaxations provided the material for this natural arrangement of the naked bodies of some of his students and himself against a summer landscape. The design is one of his most concentrated, and almost matches those of the Italian Renaissance in constructing a rhythmical pyramid. The base runs from a swimmer in the water to another thigh-deep at the edge, and is extended by the downward thrust from the legs of a third man stretched out on the bank. The axis rises from the head of this last man to the head of a standing figure who is watching another dive. The descending line of this latter body carries the eye back down into the water again. The massive, almost sculptural handling of all the bodies shows what Eakins meant by saying, "The more factors you have, the simpler will be your work." What would have appealed most to Whitman was the free flexible movement within the composition, and the rich physical pleasure in the outdoor scene and in the sunlight on the firmly modeled flesh.

Whitman's work, in turn, approaches the powerful construction of Eakins in his sketch, "Twenty-eight young men bathe by the shore," in "Song of Myself". . . .

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F. O. Matthiessen, *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* (London: Oxford University Press, 1941), 610. Excerpt. Reprinted by permission of Oxford University Press.

# Photos by Eakins: How the Famous Painter Anticipated the Modern Movie Camera

CHARLES BREGLER, 1943

These remarkable action photographs were taken by the celebrated American painter, Thomas Eakins, sometime between 1881 and 1884. They are very possibly the first photographs ever taken of a human body in action from a single point of view, either in this country or the world.

In Philadelphia early in the 1880's a number of public spirited individuals had subscribed the sum of \$30,000 to defray the expenses of the photographer, Muybridge, who was experimenting with action photography at the University of Pennsylvania. His system was to place twenty-four cameras in a row and let the subject walk or run in front them, tripping the shutter of each as he passed by. A committee of nine men, including Eakins, was appointed to supervise this experiment.

The painter soon detected the inaccuracies in Muybridge's results, and with customary thoroughness and industry tackled the problem himself, drawing upon his own more than ordinary knowledge of photography and mathematics. He constructed his own apparatus, consisting of a single camera with two disks revolving in front of a lens. These disks were made from circular saw blades with four balanced openings over which a gossamer waterproof was glued with Venice turpentine. In this gossamer waterproof openings were cut radially as wanted. Between the disks and the lens was an electric shutter. The disks were turned with a hand crank just as in ordinary movie camera today, allowing a succession of images to fall upon the negative. Immediately in front of the negative was another revolving diaphragm as a precaution against extraneous light striking the sensitized glass plate. With this camera Eakins produced photographs . . . which were recently printed from his negatives. Today it seems incredible that such original and prophetic work should have gone unnoticed, but that is exactly what happened.

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Charles Bregler, "Photos by Eakins: How the Famous Painter Anticipated the Modern Movie Camera," *Magazine of Art* 36 (January 1943): 28.

The other members of the committee were more impressed by Muybridge's spectacular methods, and Eakins's advice and suggestions were not heeded. Characteristically, he dropped the subject rather than argue about it, and returned to his painting. It is not even recorded that he expressed satisfaction over the vindication brought by subsequent developments, although these developments have demonstrated the soundness of his approach. It is evident that Muybridge himself learned much from Eakins's experiment, for he later abandoned his own system of a succession of cameras placed in a row.

This story provides interesting material for people who like to speculate on the quality of the artist mind. It suggested at once that another American artist, Samuel F. B. Morse invented the telegraph and then returned to his painting. Although Eakins would have been the last person to have claimed the invention of the movie camera, the fact remains that the basic principle of the camera as we know it today is the one he worked out and demonstrated in 1881. The motion picture, added to the historic art mediums of the world by twentieth century, was thus anticipated by an American artist.

# Art Chronicle: The Bottles Were O'Donovan's

JAMES JOHNSON SWEENEY, 1944

To judge solely by his paintings, Thomas Eakins must have been a dull man. A wall label under a photograph in a current exhibition of his work at M. Knoedler & Company, New York, reads: "Eakins in his Chestnut Street Studio. Taken while O'Donovan was working there. The bottles were O'Donovan's. Eakins was temperate in all things." And the paintings and drawings at the recent Centennial Exhibition of his work in Philadelphia show that temperance was his vice.

He had evidently no interest in emotional expression. Color had no seduction for him. He was an artisan without confidence in his free-hand drawing. He put no trust in an intuitive placing of forms on a canvas. Where there was a likelihood of even a slight compositional complexity, he would make mechanical drawings of the ground and the side and end elevations, as may be seen in the current exhibition at Knoedler's. It is true that in his later years he did not rely to the same extent on such preliminary perspective studies. At that time portraits had become his principal product and in general they did not call for such preparations. But even then, in large pictures, his biographer Mr. Lloyd Goodrich tells us, "he still laid out the ground-plan and the regular-shaped objects in perspective; in the case of a seated figure the floor and the chair would be constructed first."<sup>1</sup>

He was a painter with little feeling for the canvas as a whole. This is immediately apparent from the lack of unity between the background of *The Swimming Hole* [Swimming] and the stiffly modelled figures; or between the perfunctory backdrop of *The Fairman Rogers Four-in-Hand* [A May Morning in the Park] and the horses and carriage placed before it. Or again, in a less ambitious piece such as *Baby at Play*, we can see this even more clearly illustrated by the cavalier handling of the upper half of the picture and the evident relish with which the figure and forms in the lower half were constructed. And when he was faced by the problem of organizing a multiplicity of elements in a picture, as in *The Gross Clinic*, or even *The Swimming Hole* [Swimming], the result is usually a banal, pyramidal arrangement—dully academic, or clumsily posed.

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James Johnson Sweeney, "Art Chronicle: The Bottles Were O'Donovan's," *Partisan Review* 1.1 (Summer 1944): 335-37. Excerpt. Reprinted by permission of the Estate of James Johnson Sweeney. © Estate of James Johnson Sweeney.

Only occasionally he achieves a freshness and individuality in his composition and this significantly enough in earlier works such as *The Pair-Oared Shell* (1872), *The Biglin Brothers Turning the Stake* (1873), *The Artist and his Father Hunting Reed Birds [on the Cohansey Marshes]* (1874), *Hunting* (a sketch) (circa 1874), *River* (1881). The freshness in these works undoubtedly derives from the artist's enthusiasm for the theme of the picture as a whole; his interest here was not concentrated on an individual element, or elements. And in each case these compositions were aided toward formal unity by echoes of the dominant, almost straight horizon line or river bank in the shapes of various minor motives—the sweeps, the scull, the stake, for example, in one, or the gunwales of the boat, the pole, gun and reeds, in another. And in all five a flat unity of surface is preserved by the artist's truthfulness to his view of the settings with their broad bands of relatively unbroken color; river and sky, marsh and sky, or beach and sky.

But on the whole Eakins rarely saw the rectangle of his canvas area to be composed throughout. He was not so much interested in creating pictures out of forms as he was in painting pictures of forms. His much vaunted “realism” might be more truly described as “familiarism.” For Eakins, appearance was a reality. Metaphysical, or poetic reality was as foreign to his art as humor. His interest in the everyday world about him was in objects and forms which he might reproduce with a convincing suggestion of three-dimensionality on his canvas—particularly the nude form. But in an unsympathetic environment once again his temperance asserted itself, chilling even the courage of this interest. He was constantly aware of the nude form under his sitter's clothes. He would frequently try to prevail on his clothed female sitters to pose for him in the nude. Still he painted few nudes. Psychologically he seems to have had much in common with Etty; but he remained a Philadelphian Etty—a temperance Etty.

Eakins's weakness in painting is perhaps best brought out by his work in another medium: once again a temperate giving himself, either a blindness to the full problem posed by the chosen medium of expression, or a reluctance to face it. Sculpture had a great attraction for Eakins especially in his latter years. Yet all his work in this field was in relief, sometimes very high relief, but never in the complete round. In this sense, as Mr. Goodrich points out, it was the sculpture of a painter. Similarly, in the opposite order, his painting, through his emphasis on forms within the picture to the neglect of the formal unity of the picture as a whole, remains for the most part the painting of a man with a sculptor's interest in individual forms, not a painter's interest in organizing a unified canvas.

Eakins's virtue was an infinite capacity for taking pains in a world little interested in what he lived for. . . .

But taken all in all, Eakins remains an academician in homespun,—a model of stubbornness [*sic*] in the pursuit of an ideal—temperate as that may have been. He was a high type of the hard-working art-student of the mid-nineteenth century who returned from Paris to a native town that was so thoroughly cut off from the living currents of art that the ideas he brought back with him continued to be regarded dangerously liberal for the next half century. His idols to the end of his life in 1916 were those of his school years in Paris—all academicians of that period: Laurens, Bonnat, Regnault, and above all Gérôme—“the greatest painter of the nineteenth century,” he often said. Fortuny was another. And there is no evidence that he ever changed the opinion of Delacroix he wrote in his notebooks during his Paris years: “Ses tableaux sont abominables et généralement d’un dessin impossible.”

The greatest pitfall in ancestor-hunting is over-eagerness. There is no cause for national embarrassment in the fact that painting in the United States during the nineteenth century may not have produced figures of the international stature of such American literary figures as Melville or Henry James, or because contemporary painting in this country may not yet have produced artists of the international importance of the architect Frank Lloyd Wright, or the photographer Alfred Stieglitz. Nor is this a justification for disregarding international standards, or for a loss of sense of international proportion in judging the virtues of artists of limited local, or regional interest. We are only too glad to pit Melville, James, Wright and Stieglitz against all comers in their fields; we should frankly face the importance of looking at our lesser men in the light of a similar standard and of facing the verdict. Eakins is undoubtedly a greater painter than his American followers in somewhat the same tradition such as Duveneck, Henri and Bellows, and his predecessors back to Copley; but we must not forget his contemporaries abroad such as Degas or Renoir, or even the brilliant European academicians of that period, his own French idols and others. Nothing is gained for contemporary American art, or for the art of the future by closing our eyes to international standards in the fine arts, or by seeking to blow up a minor talent to fill the lack of a major one.

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1 *Thomas Eakins, His Life and Work*, by Lloyd Goodrich. Macmillan.

# Memories of Thomas Eakins

ADAM EMORY ALBRIGHT, 1947

What was Eakins like to the rest of the world? Well, he was neither tall nor short, thin nor stout, handsome nor ugly. Somebody once said that he looked like a bale of straw, and I guess he did, if a bale of straw could have tremendous distinction. His personality was as contradictory as his appearance. He was magnetic but reserved, perfectly honest but sincerely sympathetic. On one occasion, Eakins was appointed a member of the jury for an annual exhibition. His appointment gave every artist who had entered a picture nervous chills, while every fellow jurymen quaked in their boots lest they display some crudity of taste before the discrimination of genius. Much to everyone's surprise, Eakins passed favorably on everything submitted. The classroom insight into the struggle and aspiration back of every effort weighed more than his critical judgment. Like Christ among sinners, he saw something of good in everyone. But they must have been a sincere bunch of entrants, for had there been a fake or poseur among them, Tommy would have spotted him and cast him into the limbo of oblivion.

I can still hear Tommy say, "If you can construct a figure perfectly, hurry up and put an outline all around it before it gets away, but don't confine a figure with an outline if it is wrong. That would be unfair and look worse. Construct, paint, model. Be sure you have a human that could function, before penning him up with a line all around him. Consider the middle bone; it's not the backbone—it's in the middle of the body. Be sure you don't break any bones. Remember the ribs enclose vulnerable parts that must be protected, and they are therefore rigid. The bending is in the lumbar region. Make the pelvis wide enough to fasten on two leg bones, one on each side; and, if it's a woman—well, give her a pelvis wide enough so that she won't die in childbirth. Don't make muscles of a female's breasts, and remember that she has ribs under them the same as a man. Make the feet big enough to stand on. Begin by covering the white canvas. You can't see values with a patch of white in your face. Suppose you were trying to get a pure chord on a violin and someone in the room was thumping away on an old piano. The disturbance would be the same."

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Adam Emory Albright, "Memories of Thomas Eakins," as told to Evelyn Marie Stuart, *Harper's Bazaar* no. 2828 (August 1947): 138-39, 184. Excerpt.



One of his favorite comments was, "Go and paint an egg." That was a hard one. It was a mandate when spoken and might take you away from the life class for several days. "There is nothing so like human flesh as an egg," he would insist, "for color modeling, texture, and translucency." Just try it. Believe me, it's a job. I and my two artist sons all undertook it at one time and found it a task that called for everything we had.

Eakins looked on human and animal anatomy as marvels of mechanical construction. He loved the beauty of living things and revered the structure beneath it. That was why a dissecting room was available to members of the life class at the Academy. To maintain this required the direction of a surgeon, and Dr. S. S. Kean cooperated with his friend, Eakins, by making possible our use of equipment and subjects and by lecturing to us twice a week on anatomy. . . .

Eakins had an insatiable desire for knowledge of the anatomy and movements of men and animals. He had us make a ligamented skeleton to prove his contention that the commercial skeletons were all mounted wrong. I remember, too, his bringing to class for our experimentation and study a dog's hind leg wrapped in a gunny sack with wood and pegs, he constructed the hind leg of a horse, and, by means of strings, made the contraption imitate the movements of a horse in motion. How he ridiculed horses painted from toy hobby horses in positions which real horses could never have taken!

He also had a passion for machinery and kept a turning lathe in his studio on Chestnut Street. When he painted *The Swimming Hole* [*Swimming*], he modeled the figure of the diving boy in plastiline and put a spindle through the middle of the figure so that it could be turned upside down and hold the pose.

All this intensive study of anatomy, motion, and machinery made Eakins a natural collaborator with Muybridge in his experiments with instantaneous photographs of creatures in action, from which the first moving pictures evolved. Eakins was in correspondence with Muybridge at the time the photographer was experimenting with using a series of cameras to take successive shots of a horse in motion. When such pictures were placed on a zoetrope—a revolving tin cylinder—and viewed through a pinhole, they sprang into action. Eakins built himself a zoetrope. I whirled the cylinder myself and looked through the pinhole at these early moving pictures, astounded at the phenomenon of men walking and horses galloping in photography.

Though Eakins was on the committee which supervised Muybridge's experiments at the University of Pennsylvania, he soon differed with the photographer and began to experiment on his own. He recognized that Muybridge's sequence of snapshots had certain inaccuracies, and built himself a camera to take photographs of action from a single point of view. His photographs show several views of one motion, exposed on a single plate. Eakins's work remained unknown and did not influence the development of the motion pictures. But his photographs, taken in the early eighties, may have been the first photographs ever taken of a human body in action, from a single point of view, and the camera he constructed had the basic principles of the movie camera used today.

All of us who knew and loved Eakins regarded him as something of an all-around genius, like Leonardo. He was interested in photography primarily as it supplemented knowledge of art and anatomy. He furnished nude models for Muybridge's photographs, and we studied the human figure in action by means of the revolving tin cylinder, which stood for weeks on the table in our library.

Eakins had always believed that many equestrian paintings were untrue to the actual attitudes and movements of horses. By checking such paintings with the photographs on the cylinder he proved his point. The one shining example of absolute correctness blazed out from the antiquity in the marbles of Phidias for the frieze of the Parthenon. These, which had long puzzled students and scholars because the poses seemed strange from the standpoint of ordinary observers, were now proved to be amazingly accurate and gave rise to a speculation by Eakins that Phidias might have dissected horses and made little jointed movable models from his findings. . . .

. . . I have tried to make sure that what Tommy revealed to me was not lost to my sons. My greatest regret is that the young men and women of this generation cannot enjoy instruction under such a man, and my fondest hope, that another Eakins may arise to lead them out of the wilderness.

# Thomas Eakins

FAIRFIELD PORTER, 1959

[“]Eakins is not a painter, he is a force,” was the appraisal of Walt Whitman.<sup>1</sup>

...

A great deal is packed into Whitman’s appraisal. It implies that a moral quality, a force of character, was more important than Eakins’s artistic stature. It implies that a certain moral force is expressed in his paintings, and perhaps that Whitman understood the paradoxical nature of the content of his paintings. Briefly it is this: Eakins used art to express an American sense of life that was essentially anti-artistic. In his life time, he was not a popular painter. His contemporaries were repelled by the severity of his acceptance of the values of his environment. This acceptance was symbolized by the fact that he lived all his life, except for his student days, at the same address.

The society whose values Eakins expressed was a new one engaged in rebuilding the country after the disaster of the American Civil War. From contemporary photographs one notices even in the faces of Northerners a sense of defeat, a recognition of the necessity for self-reliance to replace the youthfulness that the war had destroyed. There was a break with tradition: the war had separated us from our past. Although the condition of the country after the war was already implicit in the many rapid changes that had gone on before it, changes based on the Westward expansion, on the struggle for dominance between North and South, and the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, still, before the war the artistic expression of the country dated back to Colonial times, behind which stood the Italian Renaissance. . . .

The French academicians painted “machines,” that is, deliberate, elaborate paintings of great size whose purpose was the display of the artist’s powers. Eakins thought of painting as a deliberate construction. His paintings of scullers were executed from studies of perspective, of reflections and of anatomy put together in the studio. An Eakins “machine” was more modest and thorough than a French academician’s; it was a fixation of an idea on canvas. . . .

Eakins’s career was a *tour-de-force*: he tried to make an art for a society that did not believe in anything beyond material facts. He tried to make something that would give this materialism meaning. . . .

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Fairfield Porter, **Thomas Eakins**, Great American Artists Series (New York: George Braziller, 1959). Excerpts, 9–10, 20, 26–28, 30. Courtesy of the Estate of Fairfield Porter.

Eakins made an effort to conform his taste to what actually was. In so far as he succeeded, he isolated himself, . . . His inner life was like an Indian wrestle in which the force of his domineering character was opposed by the power of a destructive conscience. Often the struggle between these forces led to immobility. Gérôme remarked about a watercolor of a sculler Eakins sent him from Philadelphia, that since he had chosen the central point of the stroke, the result was immobility. It led to darkness. The light in his paintings is hardly pervasive; even in *Max Schmidt in a Single Scull* [*The Champion Single Sculls*] the dark accents win out. It led to a conscientiousness about detail on one side and an insistence that everything with its load of detail be properly related to the ground, that figures have bones, that weight be supported. It led to his insistence on the primacy of thinking and was expressed in a talent for mathematics (which “you can’t fool”). It required him to consider that beauty must be paid for in order to be justified. It is paid for by courage and by difficulties; it is justified by scrupulousness in conformity to nature; things must be finished. . . .

What he could have done with a more selfish character and a weaker conscience is manifest in the sketches. . . . Or it shows in a pleasure in light in *Maybelle*, or in the relaxed, confident brushing of *Salutat*. He composed several figures best when he could identify himself with the painting, as in *The Artist and His Father Hunting Reeds Birds* [*on the Cohansey Marshes*]. . . .

Eakins did not want to transcend his environment, in fact he could not even imagine transcending it. If it rejected him, his difficulty was that he could not reject it, but had to try to prove, if only to his friends and himself, that he really fitted in harmoniously. He was rejected in his life time because society could not forgive him for accepting it as it was, instead of offering it a picture of something better. Eakins was outside of his time because his intuition was hindsight: what society had missed seeing, was what Eakins saw when it was already beginning to be too late—as a dying man is said to see his whole life clearly pass in review.

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1 Horace Traubel, *With Walt Whitman in Camden* (Boston, 1906-1953) 4 vols.

# Eakins as Functionalist

LAWRENCE E. SCANLON, 1960

In nineteenth-century America the concept of function was appealed to as a significant criterion in many areas of cultural activity. The story of American proficiency in designing tools and machinery has become legendary: in all the major trade fairs European visitors acknowledged the functional excellence of native products. For Louis Sullivan, as is almost too familiar to bear restating, function became the next thing to an ultimate value: "It is the pervading law of all things organic, and inorganic, of all things physical and metaphysical, of all things human and all things superhuman, of all true manifestations of the head, of the heart, of the soul, that the life is recognizable in its expression, that form ever follows function. This is the law."<sup>1</sup>

Function appears less emphatically but equally central in the pragmatic philosophies of Charles S. Peirce and William James. The former, generally credited with the founding of pragmatism, restricted his system to the clarification of intellectual concepts and words, the full meanings of which one finds in the way they function in experience. Thought acts, according to Peirce, to produce "habits of action." "Consequently, the most perfect account of a concept that words can convey will consist in the description of the habit which that concept is calculated to produce. But how otherwise can a habit be described than by a description of the kind of action to which it gives rise, with the specification of the conditions and of the motive."<sup>2</sup> More concerned with truth than with meaning, James nevertheless retains function as a basic principle in his brand of pragmatism. "... pragmatism gets her general notion of truth as something essentially bound up with the way in which one moment in our experience may lead us towards other moments which it will be worth while to have been led to. Primarily, and on the common-sense level, the truth of a state of mind means this function of a *leading that is worth while*."<sup>3</sup> On the basis of these statements by Sullivan, Peirce, and James, one may designate as an important attitude in their period that one which finds significant value in the relationship between the way a thing works and the purpose to which it works.

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Lawrence E. Scanlon, "Eakins as Functionalist," *College Art Journal* (CAA) 19 (Summer 1960): 322-29. Excerpt, 322-25. Reprinted by permission.

The most important American painter in this period, Thomas Eakins, would seem on the surface at least to have little use for such an attitude. Because of his preoccupation with the everyday activities of man, Eakins has occasionally been regarded as a “mere realist,” i.e., a painter who copies down on canvas only what he sees without passing it through the catalytic processes of the imagination. In view of this criticism let us look at a representative example of his work. The early (1871) *Max Schmitt in a Single Scull* [*The Champion Single Sculls*] shows Schmitt, a friend of Eakins, resting on his oars in the Schuylkill River. In the middleground the painter himself pulls hard on a scull against a background of bridges and a high embankment. Tension is established on the representational level between the figure in the foreground at rest, and the one in the middleground apparently moving. For pure representation the tension would cease at this point, because nature does not voluntarily participate in the activities of man. One may pursue the tension on the structural level, however, looking for emphasis and reemphasis of the alternation of rest and movement represented by the static and moving scullers. The sense of rest achieved in Schmitt is implicit in the masses of bridges, the solid shape of the embankment at the right, and in the unbroken plane of the water. And yet the reflections from the surface of the water also initiate a feeling of restlessness or movement based on the middle-ground figure. The images of the fore-ground sculler, scull, and oars tend to change their shapes, even if ever so slightly, when reflected in the plane of the river. The same kind of change Eakins created in the left of the painting with the water images of the trees and flowers, and especially the W-shaped log on the brink of the river. Significantly enough, the impasto rendering of this section of flowers increases the distortion in the water image.

Eakins has an equally important function for the bridges in the background. Between these masses and the foreground group of figure and scull, he sets up a complex interplay. Both masses are stationary, although the pressures of strain and span are understood in the bridges. But the interplay between the lines of the two groups expresses a sense of change since the lines in the foreground are picked up and modified in the background. The horizontal of the nearer bridge, for example, modifies the long line of the scull. The vertical line of Schmitt’s back and the curve of his head appear again and again in the arches and piers of the bridges. Perhaps the most complicated interplay is between the oarlocks and the trusses of the bridge’s center span.

Eakins works, it would appear, organically: setting up first a central motif—as here rest and movement—he then admits to his design only elements which can effectively function as contributory to this motif. Thus function itself takes on added meaning when viewed in terms of the organic, the function here being the way the basic parts like line, color, mass, etc., work together and their relationship to the over-all design. These parts seem to be thought of principally for their effectiveness in expressing the central idea. Even the representational elements in the painting are made in this way to serve a purely formal function which one would not suspect if he accepted Eakins' reputations as a realistic painter at its face value.

But one may complain that this functional adaptation of materials is the mark of most great painters, before Eakins's time and since. Eakins's commitment to function, however, is further illustrated by his characteristic approach to portraiture. The portrait of Mrs. William D. Frishmuth presents this collector of musical instruments, seated in the middleground of the painting surrounded by some of her instruments with a *viola da gamba* across her knees. Eakins's two most famous portraits reproduce Dr. Samuel D. Gross and Dr. David H. Agnew at their work as surgeon-lecturers. In this connection Lloyd Goodrich remarks, "To him [Eakins] a man's work was an essential part of him, and he liked to show his people in their everyday occupations. Dr. Gross and Dr. Agnew appeared not in the elegance of academic robes, like Sargent's *Four Doctors*, but in the operating amphitheatre, scalpel in hand, talking to their students."<sup>4</sup> In *The Concert Singer* Weda Cook, who wrote music to Whitman's "O Captain, My Captain," is represented on the stage, hands joined, and mouth opened wide in song, at her feet a bouquet of flowers and in the left-hand corner at the bottom, the hand and baton of the conductor. A person who donated a collection of musical instruments to the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, two of the nation's leading surgeons, a concert singer—these people were doers and to Eakins's way of thinking had to be painted functioning at their particular professions. An open mouth does not lend itself to pretty portraiture, but evidently the painter believed that to know a person was to know what he did. It was not enough for Eakins to make merely an ingratiating likeness: man was more than a being—he was a doer. Whoever the man was, he had a function in life and Eakins felt that this function should tell in the portrait. . . .

Thus in addition to maintaining a functional attitude towards his materials, Eakins rooted his portraiture firmly along the same lines. There is reason to believe that he even used the concept of function thematically.

A group of his paintings have in common a gallery or audience in the background watching a figure or group of figures doing something in the foreground. For convenience we may call these pictures theater or gallery paintings and include *The Gross Clinic*, *The Agnew Clinic*, *Taking the Count*, *Salutat*, *Between Rounds*, and the portrait of Professor William Smith Forbes. We might also include *The Concert Singer* in the group since an audience is understood in this painting as well. For a painter to have used this device at least six times and in two of his most important works, the clinic paintings, is an indication that the device had some significant, perhaps symbolic, meaning for him beyond mere convenience. And it is too little a convenient device for an exacting worker like Eakins. The analysis of one of these gallery paintings may yield the signification of the device.

In *Between Rounds* Eakins represents a prize ring in which a boxer rests on a stool between rounds of the fight. His two handlers work over him, while in the foreground the timekeeper sits at a table. The background is composed of a number of gallery tiers before which stands a policeman. Compositionally, the passive plane of the gallery has a rather tenuous relationship to the plane of action, the ring. The latter plane, an almost completely delimited volume—as are the planes of action in the other gallery paintings—is constructed mainly out of hard horizontal and vertical lines. The policeman at left, standing between the two planes, serves to emphasize their division. Only the lines of the upright supports—the ring post and the gallery pillars—tie the two planes together structurally, the back of the fighter forming the hypotenuse of an ideal triangle. Here the connection between the two planes ends. For the hard lines of the ring contrast sharply with the gently curving lines of the gallery, and the light in the painting moving from right to left, dramatically illuminates the fighter's glistening body, at the same time obscuring the gallery figures. And although the fighter appears to be at rest, between rounds, the tensions Eakins creates among the lines of the foreground and middle ground imply a degree of action impossible to the gallery. By the skillful variation of the basic motif, the triangle, and the parallel lines, the artist indicates the symbolic importance of the planes in front of the gallery: these are the planes of action. We have then an essentially passive group watching an important, active, living figure. The import of the main figure's situation is vividly pointed up by the timekeeper in the foreground.



One should also be aware of the microcosmic overtones of the gallery motif: Eakins apparently intends to symbolize the whole world in a microcosmic audience. Silently the audience watches a doer—be he clinician or prize fighter—which they themselves at the moment at least are not. We saw in the portraits the importance of the doer to Eakins. In the gallery paintings the doers stand in bright illumination; the passive audiences sit subordinated, obscured, watching, learning perhaps. The painter in this way shows his preference for the active functioning individual whom he consistently represents in his portraiture, while casting into gloom those who only sit statically by.

Even though the functional emphasis in Eakins's has not been commented on before, its existence should not be entirely surprising given the general nature of the American character. As early as the first permanent settlements in New England the meaningfulness of the idea of function was beginning to make itself felt. In order to carve an existence out of the wilderness, the first colonists could not afford for a moment to ignore utilitarian concerns, and the theocratic communities of the Puritans always exhibited an organizational pattern based on the most practical needs. Lewis Mumford seizes on a basic distinction in Puritan communal life when he writes, "The inequality in size and shape of plots shows always that attention was paid to the function the land was to perform, rather than to the mere possession of property."<sup>5</sup> The tendency to think of land in terms of dynamic process (function) instead of abstract principle (possession) established a precedent for many later developments. Of these Eakins's work is easily one of the most sophisticated.

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- 1 "The Tall Office Building Artistically Considered," *Kindergarten Chats and Other Writings*, ed. Isabel Athey (New York, 1955), p. 208.
  - 2 *The Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, ed. Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss (Cambridge, Mass., 1934), p. 208.
  - 3 Pragmatism and Four Essays from *The Meaning of Truth* (New York, 1955), p. 135.
  - 4 "An Eakins Exhibition," *Magazine of Art*. XXXII (November, 1939), p. 619.
  - 5 *Sticks and Stones* (New York, 1955), p. 22.

# Introduction

SIDNEY KAPLAN, 1964

In 1914, when he was seventy, the painter of *The Gross Clinic* modestly told an inquiring reporter that Winslow Homer, who had died four years before, had been the best American painter of his time. Homer, oddly enough, never painted his Negro townsmen of New York or Maine but found his black subjects at the front, in Virginia, in the West Indies. Did Homer ever really give his mind deeply in a social way to the Negro's plight? Or is it rather our great good luck that a granite honesty, like one of his Maine ledges, dashed into spray the white wave of hatred that surged about him and his sitters in Virginia?

Thomas Eakins, a humanist of broader culture, painted a few of his Philadelphia Negro friends and neighbors—a nearby family, a pupil, a rhythmic line of shad fishermen, a few hunting companions, a woman in a red shawl—with as much dedication to what he termed “the character of things” as he lavished on his white friends. Only a handful of pictures, to be sure, but in them he sought facets of the Negro's inmost being that Homer could not reach. . . .

One of his youthful works, a nude *Negress* with coral earrings—painted from life during his student days under Gérôme at the Beaux-Arts in Paris—is both warmly exotic and brownly real, quite unlike his teacher's over-finished Moorish slavegirls and “plaster Cleopatras,” as Zola once described them. Eight years after his return from France, with his *Negro Boy Dancing*, which was originally called, simply *The Negroes*, Eakins for the first time in American genre, sharply questioned the slavophile iconography of banjo, grin and jig when he depicted a serious, lyric family drawn together by music—oblivious to the vaudeville public—quicken and entranced by themselves. On the bare wall behind them hangs the fourth head of the family—a framed oval of Lincoln and his son. . . . As scrupulous in its justice to the face without a film is the dynamically modeled head of the black hunter in *Whistling for Plover*, who squats and towers like a pyramid on the marshy flats. There is a similar scene of about the same time, *Will Schuster and Blackman Going Shooting [Rail Shooting on the Delaware]*, in which the Negro hunter, his punting-pole like a javelin stretching from top to bottom of the canvas, has a

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Sidney Kaplan, “Introduction,” in *The Portrayal of the Negro in American Painting* (Brunswick, Maine: Bowdoin College Museum of Art, 1964), unpaginated; reprinted as “The Negro in the Art of Homer and Eakins,” *The Massachusetts Review* 7 (Winter 1966): 105-20. Excerpts. Reprinted by permission of *The Massachusetts Review*. Courtesy of Emma N. Kaplan.

majesty like Nathaniel Jocelyn's *Cinqué* and William Sidney Mount's spear-woman. (In still another picture of the hunt *The Artist and His Father Hunting Reed Birds on the Cohansey Marshes*, Eakins painted himself in the black's place.) Even minor appearances of the Negro in large, complex works—as, for instance, the correct coachman of *The Fairman Rogers Four-in-Hand* [*A May Morning in the Park*] . . . —show persons rather than props.

Only in Eakins's black commoners, the “divine average” of Whitman's century, do we have a visual evocation of the life-caresser's chant on a Negro teamster:

His glance is calm and commanding, he tosses the slouch  
of his hat away from his forehead,  
The sun falls on his crispy hair and moustache, falls  
on the black of his polish'd and perfect limbs.

“Whitman never makes a mistake,” Eakins liked to say.

But no image like that of the young mulatto woman of *The Red Shawl* exists in *Leaves of Grass*, nor, to be sure, among the Reconstruction figures of Homer. Eakins painted her . . . in the same year as his marvelous *Clara*; yet I would rank her unsurpassed head . . . with that crowning jewel of American portraiture, his *Edith Mahon*. (All three with their matchless eyes and throats.)

In that single portrait of a Negro woman and in the troubled countenance of his Negro pupil, Henry Ossawa Tanner of Pittsburgh, Eakins helped show the way to what he called “a great and distinctively American art.” What, indeed, is more “American” than the racial tragedy—the mastered grief, the outraged stillness, the polite cynicism—that Eakins discerned in Tanner's hypersensitive face? . . .

# A May Morning in the Park

GORDON HENDRICKS, 1965

Into the sunny vale nestled among the Victorian splendors of Philadelphia's Fairmount Park came, one fine May morning in 1879, Mr. Thomas Eakins, Professor of Drawing and Painting at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts.<sup>1</sup> Up the slope to the left from the small rise upon which the artist set his stool rose the greystone of Memorial Hall,<sup>2</sup> whose sacrosanct Art Gallery had been forbidden the great *Gross Clinic* three years before. To the right were the rococo towers of Horticultural Hall, where had been displayed—and was still being displayed—one of the most extensive collections of domestic plants in the history of the Western Hemisphere. Up the slope from the east behind the artist came the muffled sounds of traffic on the Schuylkill River, whose broad, glistening surface Eakins had painted so beautifully in *Max Schmitt in a Single Scull* [*The Champion Single Sculls*], *The Pair-Oared Shell*, and other works.

Richly throughout his work Eakins had given evidence of being the most appropriate artist in America to solve the problem which had brought him to the park this May morning. This was to paint, in motion, the coach-and-four of Fairman Rogers. Eakins's solution of the problem now hangs in the Philadelphia Museum of Art, a magnificent memorial to the intelligent beneficence of the patron, the originality and power of the photographs of Eadweard Muybridge, and the skill, integrity and imagination of the artist who created it.<sup>3</sup>

Along with much of the rest of the world, both Eakins and Rogers had had early, eager contact with Muybridge's motion photographs of the preceding June.<sup>4</sup> Eakins may have written to Muybridge as early as the previous November. For shortly before November 21, 1878 (the date of the following excerpt) the photographer called at the office of *The San Francisco Alta California* and left the following result of his visit:

The instantaneous pictures of the running and trotting horse, at full speed, taken on an original plan devised by a California photographic artist, with the assistance of a San Francisco capitalist, have . . . called out a number of letters

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Gordon Hendricks, "A May Morning in the Park," *Philadelphia Museum of Art Bulletin* 60 (Spring 1965): 49–64. Excerpts. © Philadelphia Museum of Art. Reprinted by permission.

from artists, anatomists, horse-fanciers, and others, all expressing the hope that other pictures of a similar character will be taken. A lecturer on anatomy in an art school wants a series showing the changes in the position of the muscles while running. . .

This “lecturer on anatomy in an art school” may have been Eakins, whose anatomy lectures had become famous.

But a letter of the following May 7 from Muybridge to Eakins, which reached Eakins about the time he was applying himself to the Rogers commission, suggests that the painter had only recently written the photographer—and for the first time. The original of this letter is now lost. . . . But the careful work of Lloyd Goodrich, who visited Mrs. Eakins in the early 1930s, preserves this:

Dear Mr. Eakins, I am much pleased to hear the few experimental photos we made last year have afforded you so much pleasure, and notwithstanding their imperfection have been so serviceable. I shall commence with the new experiments next week and we shall hope to give you something better than we before accomplished . . . a map of the track will be made. . . .

I invited Mr. Rogers to come out here during the time we shall be at work. The trip will well repay him, not only from the great interest he has manifested in the subject of our experiment but also in the pleasure he would feel in visiting our mountains, and their glorious scenery, and the extensive ranchos and stock farms. Cannot you persuade him to come out? Newport will always be there, but probably our experiments will terminate this summer. . . .

Faithfully yours, Muybridge.

The opening suggests that Muybridge is now responding to Eakins for the first time, and Muybridge’s habits also make a delay from the previous November unlikely. Also, the “lecturer on anatomy[’s]” request may have been transmitted by Rogers.

The remark about mapping the track does not seem to accord with another letter we presume to be Eakins' reply. This was a rough draft only, but, according to Lloyd Goodrich's notes, it was written on the same paper and with the same pen and ink as another letter written not earlier than late April:

Dear Muybridge, I pray you to dispense with your lines back of the horse in future experiments, I am very glad you are going to draw out the trajectories of the different parts of the horse in motion. . . .

Have one perpendi[cular] [centre] line only behind the horse marked on your photographic plate. Then after you have run your horse and have photographed him go up and hold a measure perpendicularly right over the centre of his track and photograph it with one of the cameras just used.

Do you not find that in your old way the perspective [is] very troublesome? The lines being further off than the horse a calculation was necessary to establish the size of your measure, the horses being a little nearer or a little farther off from the reflecting screen deranged and complicated the calculation each time.<sup>5</sup>

. . .

Fairman Rogers himself had written to Muybridge by February 23, 1879.<sup>6</sup> Later he wrote in *Art Interchange* of July 9, 1879, that Eakins had "constructed, most ingeniously, the trajectories":

Shortly after the appearance of the photographs, Mr. Thomas Eakins of Philadelphia, instructor in the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, who had long been studying the horse from an artistic point of view, and whose accurate anatomical knowledge fitted him especially for the investigation, took them up for examination. . . . To obtain a perfectly satisfactory result, drawings must be based upon the information given by the photographs. To do this, Mr. Eakins plotted carefully, with due attention to all the conditions of the problem, the successive positions of the photographs and constructed, most ingeniously, the

trajectories, or paths, of a number of points of the animal, such as each foot, the elbow, hock, centre of gravity, cantle of the saddle, point of cap of the rider, etc. . . .

The glass transparencies that Eakins made of these trajectories he must have shown to his Academy class.<sup>7</sup> This was the class famous in art circles throughout the United States for its basic research in anatomy. . . .

Fairman Rogers was one of those men privileged to enjoy wealth without the necessity of gathering it. His father was a wealthy iron merchant who gave his son a fine town house on his wedding day and left him a considerable fortune to do with as he pleased. What Rogers “pleased to do” with the fortune made him the very model of a civilized bon vivant.<sup>8</sup> Never did his wealth weigh him down. He used it for his own pleasure and for his family and friends—although his wife came to him apparently laden with even more coin of the realm than he had.<sup>9</sup> He also played a very active part in the social life of Philadelphia by right of birth, inheritance and marriage, even though his house at 202 Rittenhouse Square was a short distance off the Social Essence of Walnut Street.<sup>10</sup>

Rogers was also an intellectual of standing: Professor of Civil Engineering at the University of Pennsylvania, Lecturer on Mechanics at the Franklin Institute, a founder of the National Academy of Sciences, and the author of several significant technical works.<sup>11</sup> He was also a founding director of the Academy of Music. He was a trustee of the University of Pennsylvania, and when the provost resigned in 1880 was asked to fill that office, as a combination university president, dean and provost.

He was morally and financially instrumental in helping to bring into being the Academy of the Fine Arts’ great Ruskinian Victorian building at Broad and Cherry Streets, and continued (also both morally and financially) to elevate its standards.

. . .

Rogers was a founder and enthusiastic member of the famous Coaching Club, along with such famous names as Belmont, Havemeyer, Vanderbilt and Whitney. It is claimed that he was the first in Philadelphia to drive a four-in-hand, but I have found no evidence for this.<sup>12</sup> Six years before the Eakins commission, he had had a coach built by Barker & Company, of London, and its glittering red and black are a striking element of the painting. This coach is illustrated in Rogers’ 1899 *Manual [of Coaching]*, a work that deserves to be called “definitive”: it is still the “Bible” of coaching. Eakins altered many of the coach’s details, as Rogers probably expected him to. How

else, for example, could all the people Rogers (or his wife) wanted on top of the coach have been seen if they had not been carefully arranged between each other on a single long seat?

As a photographer himself, Rogers had reason to be interested in Muybridge's photographs. He had been, for some years, an enthusiastic amateur photographer in a day when amateur photographers led many professionals in the quality and skill of their product. Seven years before Muybridge began his work in Palo Alto, Rogers was hoping to photograph his horses in motion, and had built an ingenious, novel shutter for that purpose.

...

Although Eakins frequently saw and sketched Rogers on the box of his four-in-hand, he must have sketched the relatives from life elsewhere—or from photographs. The lady I take to be Mrs. Franklin A. Dick—Mrs. Rogers' sister, and the gentleman I take to be George Gilpin—her brother, are both too well-defined to have been sketched from the distance indicated.<sup>13</sup> This definition is also true of the prim figure of Mrs. Rogers. The in-laws were kept in the shade! The sketch of Mrs. Rogers, on the verso of the Museum's rocky landscape sketch, is accompanied by a note in Mrs. Eakins' hand saying that it was sketched in Newport, and we do know that Eakins was in Newport in September of 1879—some months after May, when we presume the work was close to a final version. Perhaps, incidentally, since Mrs. Rogers and her blood relatives are detailed with what Strahan called "Meissonier-like fidelity," she may have commissioned the work herself. The record book which may have given Goodrich his information about the fee, \$500, is now unlocated. This information, or a possible source for it, may not have come to Goodrich from Mrs. Eakins, since several years were to pass before she married the artist.

The team in *A May Morning in the Park* has little "snap" to it. And Rogers himself, turned nearly full-face toward the observer, is shown in a position he would have found appalling in a proper coachman. . . .

Eakins is said to have had the coach-and-four driven past him again and again. He had the six Muybridge series and it was thus possible, *for the first known time in the history of art*, to create a correct picture of animals in motion. During the course of his work he made models of the four in wax. "Bregler," wrote Margaret McHenry,<sup>14</sup> "had the recipe," but Eakins made the wax. He then painted the models red.

He then had to decide between making the horses *look* as if they were in motion (according to the tastes of the time), and making them look as he knew—from the Muybridge photographs—they actually were. He also had



to decide the same matter about the wheels of the coach. As for the first problem, his course was clear: why bother at all, asked this most honest of painters and his patron, to use another rockinghorse position when it was not life? They wanted to show horses as they *were*—not as they were supposed to be. So, with a single curious exception, the four-in-hand are painted to correspond with the Muybridge series of “Abe Edgington” and “Occident.” The exception is the “near-wheeler,” who is walking! Why it is walking when there is no time during the movement of a four-in-hand that one horse walks while the other three trot, we cannot know. All trotting horses support themselves (when they are being supported) on their diagonals. And this is true of both lead horses and the “off-wheeler” of *A May Morning in the Park*. But it is not true of the “near-wheeler”: that horse is supporting himself on his far laterals—an impossible position for a trotter.

As for the wheels, some time later *The New York Times* described the project thus:

Like many other discoveries, the truths revealed by the camera were misinterpreted by some men and applied in such a fashion as to excite ridicule. In this way the beauty and usefulness of the experiments have been somewhat obscured. A painter in Philadelphia, for instance, made a picture of a four-in-hand in which the four horses were drawn according to positions which have been revealed as really those of a trotting horse, yet in effect completely absurd. Had he been consistent, this artist must have painted the wheels with every spoke definite as if at rest. That, however, taken in conjunction with the strange postures of the hoof and legs of the horses, would have brought the whole team to a dead standstill. He was therefore compelled to show motion by the wheels, which he did in the ordinary fashion by giving a blur where the instantaneous photograph would have shown each spoke at rest. The horses looked as if struck by a petrifying disease in their places; the coach was also stationary, in sympathy with the team, but the wheels were whirling like the pin-born [*sic*] fireworks sacred to St. Catherine.<sup>15</sup>

Eakins had decided to do what he thought would be least confusing. That was blur the whole wheel. To expect the public to believe in a wheel with only the lower spokes clear-cut was, he decided, expecting too much. And although the truth of Eakins' painting is one of its most significant characteristics, and one which sets him above most others, he decided that he would not show the truth here. He may have painted the spokes as Muybridge's photographs showed them to be, defined at the bottom and blurred at the top, and then changed them at Rogers' suggestion—which might coincide with what the *Evening Telegraph* reporter saw.

...

There is a possibility that Eakins also wanted to avoid, as extraneous and distracting, the controversy about the wheel which had been raging among the lay public for centuries. This was whether or not the upper spokes of a wheel traveled faster than the lower ones. Muybridge's photographs proved that they did. But laymen still could not believe it, whatever satisfaction *The Scientific American* felt.<sup>16</sup> . . . The forward movement of a coach is, of course, at the same rate as the axle. To overtake the axle, the upper spokes must go faster than the axle, and to be left behind the axle, the lower spokes must go slower than the axle.

The eternal reality-versus-art debate was revived by *A May Morning in the Park* at its first public showing.<sup>17</sup> The *Philadelphia North American* of November 19, 1880 had this to say:

. . . there is always something to learn from Mr. Eakins, even though the result of a close study is not akin to absolute satisfaction . . . a brilliantly-painted coaching scene, admirable in most of its details, even to the most insignificant trapping on the harness. In this Mr. Eakins, as a result of his anatomical investigation, and goaded, perhaps, by the remembrance of certain instantaneous photographs of horses in rapid motion, which recently gave rise of something of a panic among animal painters, has forsaken the method of representing quick action, and has adopted the very different mode of progression revealed by the camera. The result cannot be said to be encouraging. Those of our readers who may remember these photographs will be aware that, even at the highest rate of trotting speed, the attitude of the horse, if it indicated motion at all, was apparently sluggish in the extreme. There is no doubt of its truth

in the photograph as a means of study, but there may well be grave misgivings as to the wisdom of its adoption in the finished picture. By the same means the whirling spokes of a coach wheel would be given as if they were at rest, and such a mode of treatment would be incredibly ridiculous; and, in fact, Mr. Eakins does not venture on treating his coach wheels so. They revolve in the usual undistinguishable glitter. The fact is that the human eye cannot follow the swiftly moving limbs of the horse, and any attempt to arrest them on canvas can but result in disaster. Here, for instance, the near hind leg of one of the horses is momentarily suspended from the hip joint—precisely, we may suppose, as it would be in nature, if the eye could fix it. We are sure Mr. Eakins is incapable of any mistake in that particular. As it is, it gives no idea of motion. It rather looks as if the animal were painfully aware of an unlucky stone in the foot, and was unable, through pain, to touch the ground. . . . One thing is certain. in spite of all Mr. Eakins' special training and his capacity for treating the problem, he has not yet mastered it, and his picture must be viewed merely as an experiment—the precursor, possibly, of success in a novel mode of search after exact truth.

. . .

*The Evening Bulletin*, of October 28, 1880, although its reporter did not have much to say, was nevertheless the only local paper to give *A May Morning in the Park* no dissenting remark. . . .

. . . [T]he remarkably shallow and condescending review of *The American Art Review* (page 103 of Volume 2) summed up the general consensus:

Finally [among the genre works of the show], the importance of the artist demands that Mr. Thomas Eakins's . . . *A May Morning in the Park* should not be passed by in silence, although that course would be the more agreeable. That Mr. Eakins is a colorist, no one, we think, has ever claimed; but that he is a strong artist, with a strange power of fascination, will be more readily admitted, And yet [*A May Morning in the Park* is] not only utterly without color, but utterly lifeless. . . . As a demonstration of the fact that the artist must fail when he attempts to depict what is,

instead of what *seems to be*, this picture is of great value, and perhaps the artist himself has by this time seen his mistake, and only allows the picture to be shown so that others may profit by his experience.

*A May Morning in the Park* no longer lacks the approval it failed to arouse in 1880. Along with the *Gross Clinic*, the William Rush series, and some of the scull pictures and more formal portraits, it ranks as one of Eakins' most engaging and important works. In focus, in the coach of a Philadelphian, is the essence of the photography-versus-art controversy: is the truth, art? *A May Morning in the Park* is, for the historian, a meeting point for decision concerning this last holdout of realistic painters. This was their exclusive ability to depict motion—an ability that had been theirs to have and to hold until the systematic work of Edward Muybridge. That it may also have been a turning point in the work of Thomas Eakins—and therefore in the history of American art—is a subject for later study.

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- 1 Technically, Eakins was not yet officially so-called: that title became his only in September, when he wrote his jubilant letter of the 9th. But the locale within Fairmount Park is plain to the present-day visitor, and although the painting was reworked, it is dated by the artist 1879. Edward Strahan wrote (in *The Art Amateur* of December 1880) that "the motion of the horses has been studied, improved, altered, repainted, and perfected during a long year," and it is logical to assume that when Rogers and Eakins saw the Muybridge series (see note 4) they got the idea. They must have seen these comfortably before the end of 1878. We know from *The Philadelphia Evening Telegraph* of November 4, 1880, that Eakins worked on the painting after Rogers had it: "The artist worked on this picture since we saw it shortly after it was placed in the gallery of the owner. . . ." Rogers's preoccupation with his horses, incidentally, is shown in Eakins's bronzes of "Josephine," apparently the off-lead horse in the finished work; a bas-relief of 1878 (PM 30-32-23) and an *écorché* of 1882 (PM 30-32-25).
  - 2 At the time Eakins was in the park, called "Permanent Exhibition."
  - 3 *A May Morning in the Park* is oil on canvas, 24 x 36, signed on the stonework at the lower left: "EAKINS/79" (accession 30-105-1). Nine corollary works are also in the Museum's collections, a sketch for the Fairmount Park landscape, oil on wood, 14 ½ x 10 ¾, signed lower right (by Mrs. Eakins, apparently): "Fairmount Park T.E." and on the back: "Study in Fairmount Park T. E.," together with two labels pasted there by Mrs. Eakins at the time of the gift of her husband's works in 1929—in one of which she calls the work "Coach and Four" (accession 30-32-10); a slight color sketch of a detail of this landscape on the verso of the immediately preceding, 3¼ x 9 (accession 30-32-10R); a sketch showing the coach-and-four, with Mr. and Mrs. Rogers and a groom atop driving from left to right in front of a rocky landscape, signed lower left (and lower right?): "T.E." by apparently, Mrs. Eakins, oil on wood, 10¾ x 14¾, partly squared off for enlarging and identified in Mrs. Eakins' labels on the back as having been made in Newport (accession 30-32-18); a study of Mrs. Rogers' head on the verso of the immediately preceding, oil on wood, 8½ x 4¾, and identified in Mrs. Eakins' label as having been painted in Newport (accession 30-32-18R); a sketch of the near-lead horse, oil on wood, 14¾ x 14½ on the verso of a work named "The Boatman" by Mrs. Eakins' label (accession 30-32-11R); a set of four bronzes of the horses, cast in 1946 from the waxes now in the

possession of Paul Mellon, 9 ⅞ x 9 ½ x 12 ½ (accessions 50-92-34, 35, 36 and 37). Corollary works elsewhere are: 1, the black and white copy, oil on canvas, 24 x 36, made by Eakins for Rogers' *A Manual of Coaching* (J. B. Lippincott, 1900), now in the City Art Museum of St. Louis; 2, the four waxes of the horses, now in the Paul Mellon collection; 3, four bronzes of the horses, also in the Paul Mellon collection—I have been told that the moulds were broken after the two castings; 4, sketches of the head and right foreleg of near-wheel horse and a face drop with the Rogers monogram, oil on wood, 9 ⅞ x 13 ⅝, now in the Hirshhorn Collection; 5, sketch of entire off-lead horse, oil on wood, 13 ½ x 9 ⅞, with a slight suggestion of a repeat of rear left hoof, Hirshhorn Collection (this is "Josephine," presumably, since she was a lead horse and, according to a photo in Rogers' *Manual*—and the Eakins 1878 bronze relief—she had an extensive forelock); 6, sketches of the head, forelegs and right fore hoof of near-lead horse, oil on wood, 9 ⅞ x 13 ⅝, Hirshhorn Collection; 7, sketches of body without head and right fore hoof, and right fore hoof of near-wheel horse, oil on wood, 13 ⅞ x 9 ⅞, Hirshhorn Collection. According to Mr. Abram Lerner, curator of the Hirshhorn Collection, none of the Hirshhorn sketches have related sketches on each side; they may have been works unknown to Goodrich at the time of his 1933 catalogue, or they may have been split sometime after Goodrich saw them—the descriptions in the Goodrich catalogue are not sufficiently clear to make conclusive identification possible.

- 4 These appear to be cabinet-size mounted photographs of respectively, 12, 12, 8, 6, 6 and 12 attitudes of the following horses in Leland Stanford's Palo Alto stable; "Edgington" trotting, "Occident" trotting, "Edgington" trotting, "Edgington" walking, "Mahomet" cantering, and "Sallie Gardner" running. They had been widely distributed throughout the world after their copyrights in the previous July and August.
- 5 This second letter concerned the dispute between the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts and the Society of American Artists about hanging arrangements for the *Gross Clinic*. This matter is involved, and will be discussed in detail in later work.
- 6 The *San Francisco Morning Call* of this date reported that: "Many Eastern gentlemen are very much interested, and Fairman Rogers, of Philadelphia, is as enthusiastic as Marey" [i.e., the French physiologist].
- 7 Some of these are now at the Franklin Institute. Eakins apparently also gave copies of the 6 Muybridge series to at least some of his pupils: one such set is now in my possession from the son of one of them.
- 8 The frontispiece of H. H. Furness, *Fairman Rogers* (Philadelphia, 1906) is a fine photograph of Rogers. Others are opposite pages 302 and 414 of Rogers' *A Manual of Coaching* and in the possession of relatives. An interesting oil by De Camp, somewhat softer than the photographs, hangs at the left of the entrance of the Towne Scientific School of the University of Pennsylvania.
- 9 Rebecca Rogers was the daughter of George F. Gilpin and the Gilpins were landowners when the Biddles were tradesmen. After her husband's death in Vienna in 1900, Mrs. Rogers returned to Philadelphia to live in dignified seclusion at the Aldine Hotel. Rogers lived so well that he must have spent capital, since his entire personal property was valued at only \$100,000 at the time of his death, and his widow's estate is still active.
- 10 A George Parsons Lathrop article in *Harpers* of February 1882 speaks of Walnut Street as being at that time "the backbone of the distinctively fashionable region," and Market Street to the north as being quite the last outpost of respectability. The house on Rittenhouse Square, now harboring the offices of the Philadelphia Diocese of the Episcopal Church, was sometimes called 1902 South 16th Street and sometimes 202 West Rittenhouse Square. After Rogers left it to live permanently in Newport, it was taken over by Alexander J. Cassatt, and later by the Episcopal Church.

- 11 Many libraries have at least two of these: *Magnetism of Iron Vessels and Combinations of Mechanism Representing Mental Processes*.
- 12 This was claimed by his brother-in-law H. H. Furness, in his *Fairman Rogers*. Goodrich states that Rogers was "one of the first" in Philadelphia, which must be correct.
- 13 These people are identified by Mrs. William Alexander Dick, the daughter of the Dicks in the painting, in her letter of transmittal to the Philadelphia Museum. Mrs. Stanley Bright, Mrs. Rogers' grandniece, and Mr. Fairman Rogers Furness, Mr. Rogers' grandnephew (to whom I am grateful for favors—not to mention pleasant associations—in the preparation of this article), agree.
- 14 On page 43 of her *Thomas Eakins Who Painted* (privately published in 1946).
- 15 Of March 5, 1888.
- 16 Of November 16, 1878.
- 17 This began on November 1, 1880:  
On Monday next [reported *The Evening Bulletin* of October 28], at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, that enterprising and public-spirited organization, the Philadelphia Society of Arts, will hold its second annual exhibition, and the display of paintings, water-colors, etchings, etc., is undoubtedly the finest collection of pictures by American artists ever brought together in this country. All the leading artists of the country are presented, while the young men of the art world come conspicuously to the front. . . .  
  
Taking it altogether, the second annual exhibition of the Society of Artists, is one of the most important art displays with which Philadelphia, with the exception of the Centennial, has ever been favored, and though large in extent, is notable as well for its merit as for quantity.  
  
The *North American* of November 11, added: " . . . at present the hopeful promise is that this, the finest exhibition that America has ever seen, will be, in more ways than one, a landmark in the history of art." *A May Morning in the Park* was No. 349 in Gallery F of his exhibition. A woodcut engraving of the essence of the work was reproduced in the catalogue opposite page 38, and later in the Edward Strahan *Art Amateur* article already referred to.

# Eakins

SYLVAN SCHENDLER, 1967

Genre painting ordinarily does not carry philosophic weight, though nothing has ever prevented it from doing so. Typically, its men and women are not seen as individuals, but as examples. In Philadelphia, genre work, like portraiture, was acceptable if it made neither intellectual nor moral demands of the picture viewer, if it implied no serious view of existence, if it was pleasant, picturesque, and anecdotal in a simple-minded way. Eakins's work made its demands. It was built upon intellectual and psychological awareness, especially in the idea of a relation between subject and environment, uncommon in American painting of that time. If it was pictorially pleasing, it had to be regarded seriously; it demanded an attention to its meanings as well as to its more apparent moods.

...

At the end of that decade of uncertainty [1890s] with its signs of frustration and incompleteness and its moving apprehensions of the tragic, Eakins emerged to produce the grand series of boxing paintings which derive from the epic sense of life always fundamental to his nature. These powerful affirmations of human endurance, achieved in the absence of bitterness and irony, are testimony to his strength and to his fundamental health. Yet they are not without their sadder meanings. In them the consciousness of time becomes atmosphere and setting for the classical and epic sense of body, and carnival is celebrated in full awareness of mortality.

The static effect of *Taking the Count*, painted in 1898, derives, as it did in his earlier work, from a response to history as well as to biological time. Here, vision coerces the epic moment to a monumental stillness before life bursts loose again. The old criticism that Eakins cannot paint movement is not entirely relevant in this painting and elsewhere where the achieved effect is of so high an order. The posed and poised figures have been brought to a stop, and the elemental meaning each represents is defined in that mood of quiet yet forceful tension that flows beneath so much of his work. In balance with the latent power of the standing boxer is the meaningful vitality of the boxer taking the count and about to stand. Are they compositionally

unrelated in any other way? Eakins seems concerned to define each of their attitudes in isolation, as if the stance itself were most important, and not its relation to some other posture. The relation is to something wider. The solid painting, the integrity with which each figure is rendered in this scene, the two boxers, the referee, the two attendants behind the ropes (one holding the lower rope of the ring, watching, the other counting, pointing), all contribute to an effect given a subtle resonance by the treatment of theme. The posters hung up on the gallery, simple documentary elements of the scene, colorful reminders of the late nineties, are parodies of the painting's meaning, light-hearted commentaries upon its serious purpose. The audience watching this encounter will be seen at other dramas, to see Louis Mann (the dandy in comic pose) as Hans Mix in *The Ballet Girl*, and Miss Clara Lipman in the *Telephone Girl* at the Walnut Theatre. It all coheres. History and time are suspended in this frieze, and the referee, caught in it, an isolated figure himself, is almost a sleepwalker during the count, an abstracted figure waiting.

In *Salutat* (1898) the boxer leaving the arena raises his right hand in a salute to the applauding spectators. Unlike Bellows, who was to see boxing in another light entirely, through a vision like Goya's, the savagery of the fighters in terrific movement, the grotesque animal physiognomies of the spectators screaming encouragement, Eakins accepts the gladiatorial idea entirely without irony. There is a decorum in the excitement of these well-dressed Philadelphians, and a decorum as well as a realism in the procession of men leaving, one of the seconds with a towel, the other with his bucket, sponge and bottle. The painting has the effect of a pagan religious rite in this expressed reverence for the figure of the hero. . . . Curiously, in the light full on his body, his skin is almost pallid, a yellow white, a gray white, except for the face and neck, as if Eakins wished more to emphasize anatomy itself, and the weight of the standing figure.

The audience is thrust further into the background in *Between Rounds* (1890), a sea wash of humanity against whom the isolated boxer is seen. In the oil sketch for the painting the face of the boxer has the heavy insolence of youth, full of the pulsing blood of life. But in the finished painting he is a man with a fine, strong nose, thoughtful, abstracted as he waits for the timekeeper's signal.

Time asserts itself in the faces of older bearded men among the audience and the very atmosphere of the scene, the sense of smoke filling the arena, is the very atmosphere of time. One's eye moves from the boxer to the spectators to the timekeeper, to the seconds. The timekeeper marks the suspended moment between rounds. One young handler in his blue shirt waves



a towel. The other, bent over the boxer (the massive figure of Elwood McClosky, "The Old War Horse") holds a waterbottle by the neck in his powerfully drawn left hand. These are actors in a ritual whose elements of timelessness, monumentally conceived, are set once more against a chorus now marking time past. And the moment passes under the timekeeper's hand.

*Taking the Count*, *Salutat*, and *Between Rounds* in effect form a triptych celebrating human endurance through these images of the man downed, the victor, and the boxer waiting. There is no image of utter failure and defeat. Their epic effect is not in the grossly heroic or postured and not in the violently dramatic. It flows from the habitual restraints imposed upon vision and design, now exercised by the older craftsman to produce a solidity, a monumentality, an effect of permanence and unassuming grandeur still drawing its paradoxical vitality from assertions of mutability and mortality.

The boxing paintings throw our recollections back a quarter of a century to the great rowing scenes in which Eakins had expressed his feeling for personal, for biological and for historical time through the technique learned from Gérôme, the technique of the near view, of objects seen with an almost surreal clarity. Now the mature style of the master expresses itself through the technique of the distant view, more open, broad, bold, more appropriate to the profound detachment of the older man.

# Chapter 11. Thomas Eakins, Science and Sight

BARBARA NOVAK, 1969

When Thomas Eakins (1844-1916) visited the Universal Exposition in Paris in 1867, he was more interested in the locomotives and machinery than in the art.<sup>1</sup> This curiosity about mechanism, with its concomitant respect for fact, led him into serious anatomical studies—like the Renaissance masters who dissected to use knowledge as an instrument of truth. With Eakins, this desire for knowledge—an almost obsessive one in his case—extended to the use of the machine as tool (photography) and into mathematics. His art thus belongs, in many of its aspects, to the mensurational, machine-connected aesthetic that characterizes much American art before and after him.<sup>2</sup> In his grave attempts to reconcile knowledge with art, he was perhaps the most philosophical and conscientious of American artists.

Like Homer, Eakins continued to monumentalize the genre tradition of Mount. And Philadelphia became for him, as did Stony Brook for Mount, a locus for complicated perspective studies. Eakins was as aware as Mount and Homer of the challenges of plein-air observation, and he sometimes went up to the roof with rag models, using actual sunlight, as Homer did, to reconstruct scenes observed elsewhere. Occasionally, for boating pictures, Eakins advised that the student set the boat into place by simulating its position with a brick.<sup>3</sup> Thus, direct observation, secondary re-creation through the model, and mathematical (sometimes mechanical drawing) aids were all brought to bear on a single picture.

It is not surprising that at times his pictures lack easy resolutions and authoritative syntheses. Within the same painting, the mathematical and the visual could coexist without reconciliation. Yet the outcome often has an odd conviction, deriving precisely from this combined process, declaring a cousinship to similarly compounded works within the American tradition. This is especially obvious in the superb boating pictures of the early 1870's. Eakins's most famous statement recognizes the components of this process:

In a big picture you can see what o'clock it is, afternoon or morning, if it's hot or cold, winter or summer and what kind of people are there, and what they are doing and why they

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Barbara Novak, "Chapter 11. Thomas Eakins, Science and Sight," in *American Painting of the Nineteenth Century: Realism, Idealism, and the American Experience* (New York: Praeger, 1969), 191-210, notes, 311-13. Excerpts, 191-99, 202-3, 311-13; 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 159-173, notes, 262-63. Excerpts, 159-65, 169, 262-63. Reprinted by permission of Oxford University Press and the author.

are doing it. . . . If a man makes a hot day he makes it like a hot day he once saw or is seeing; if a sweet face, a face he once saw or which he imagines from old memories or parts of memories and his knowledge, and he combines and combines, never creates—but at the very first combination no man, and least of all himself, could ever disentangle the feelings that animated him just then, and refer each one to its right place.<sup>4</sup>

Such a statement is a reminder that Eakins, like the luminists, was deeply aware of specifics of time and weather. But, more important, it shows that he understood that his art was a “combination” of the known, seen, and remembered—though, as Fairfield Porter has aptly commented, “he trusted his head more than his hand and knowledge more than appearance.”<sup>5</sup>

Eakins was correct in observing that no man could “disentangle the feelings” of the artist and “refer each one to its right place.” But Eakins’s combining *process* can be “disentangled” and referred to points of origin in his complicated sensibility. Thus, in his early masterpiece, *Max Schmitt in a Single Scull* [*The Champion Single Sculls*] (1871), one can isolate sections that seem to have drawn on immediate plein-air response, that were probably painted on the spot, as, for example, the trees at the left, where the stroke is lighter and more spontaneous. But the figure of Schmitt himself is so sharply focused that it is more likely a studio portrait, too heavy in its plastic assertiveness for the fragile, ideographic boat. One senses that boat, man, and water were not all apprehended and painted simultaneously but put together out of different aspects of the painter’s experience and sensibility. The bur-nished portions of the painting, the quiet detail near the boat in the left background, and the studied still-life observation of the oars in the foreground recall that particular conjugation of memory and knowledge peculiar to luminism.

In fact, these boating pictures continue luminism’s attitude to time. Being has not yet given way to becoming, though luminist anonymity has been displaced by a more obviously painterly process that quietly establishes the artist as intermediary between the work of art and the spectator. In pre-Civil War art in America, this use of tactile, opaque pigment—away from descriptive to more visual ends—is largely found in the proto-Impressionist studies of the Hudson River men. After the war, of course, the general trend

of American art, and, indeed, of Western art, was toward the painterly. But the importance of this for American art is in the way artists such as Eakins and Homer utilized the new perceptual possibilities of plein-airisme and integrated them with their indigenous conceptual bias. It is this integration, this resolution of the vision of their period (time style) and their American proclivities (national style) that makes for the uniqueness of their contribution.

Eakins's boating pictures, then, offer us a vision tempered by science, by the abstraction of mathematics, by the study of reconstructed models of parts of the scene observed,<sup>6</sup> and by a discreet painterly plein-air response. In *John Biglin in a Single Scull*, despite the assertion of painterly stroke, a luminist mood prevails, deriving primarily from the measured containment whose logic is clarified by the perspective study. The empty foreground plane, the scull marking off a dominant horizontal (slightly angled into space in a typically luminist escape from rigidity), the jutting edge of an adjacent scull at the left, and the careful placement of the scull near the horizon all recall luminist parallelism. As with *Max Schmitt*, the relation of the figure to the calibrated empty space seems profoundly charged.

In some of the hunting scenes of the same period, such as *Whistling for Plover*, this grave spatial locution, exaggerated still further, becomes the real theme. In *The Artist and His Father Hunting Reed-Birds [on the Cohansey Marshes]* space also is given the dominant expressive role. It is psychologically plausible that the action of the figures in the boat be arrested; the action is slowed and checked by the tangled marsh grasses. Yet it seems significant that this halt of time and motion partakes of the same general character as that of the presumably more "fluid" boating pictures. In Eakins's hands, as often in Homer's, the ephemeral signatures of water and air are replaced by material densities. If we look at the water in *Max Schmitt*, we find that its surface has been carefully demarcated. The passage of the distant sculler (Eakins himself) is marked by pairs of interrupted lines that have replaced the pockets of water out of which the oars have been lifted. Schmitt's course is denoted by similar lines. Such lines, though they arise from movement, do not give an idea of movement. They are used by Eakins to measure and fix location in space more clearly.

The question of stopped motion again raises the problem of a distinctive American attitude toward a "fixed" reality and the use of the machine as a tool to stabilize and verify physical certainties. Though artists like Mount and Eakins used complex mathematical perspectives to determine placement of things in space, they also used another mechanical device whose immense

effect on much nineteenth-century painting has had insufficient attention. "It is surprising," Beaumont Newhall has remarked, "that today's art historians with their delight in probing into the prototype of every artist's work, should so generally fail to recognize that photography has been ever since 1839 both a source and an influence to hosts of painters."<sup>7</sup>

Photography has long been recognized for its role in liberating the painter from the necessity for realistic representation to concentrate on the autonomy of the picture. But little attention has been given to the early use of the daguerreotype and subsequently of the photograph as a tool to make the studies of "reality" that the artist could then use in his studio to freeze and capture effects of light and dark and, mainly, to fortify conceptual knowledge.

Art historical investigation of the problem might go at least as far back as Leonardo's diagram of the camera obscura (if not as far back as Euclid, who seems to have known its principles), would include consideration of Vermeer's now well-established use of the instrument and extend in nineteenth-century America to artists like Fitz Hugh Lane. . . . We may ask whether it is a coincidence that the startling luminist paintings of Bingham and Mount around 1845 occurred at the same time as the widespread introduction of the stopped eye of the daguerreotype,<sup>8</sup> with its long exposures to a subject sometimes literally held motionless in a vise.

The camera, of course, had its effects on both sides of the ocean. In France, Delacroix was extremely enthusiastic: "Let a man of genius make use of the Daguerreotype as it should be used, and he will raise himself to a height that we do not know."<sup>9</sup> Ingres admired photographs for an "exactitude that I would like to achieve."<sup>10</sup> Courbet used photographs as sources, as did Manet, whose etching of Edgar Allen Poe (a strong influence on French Symbolists) has been "linked directly to a well-known American daguerreotype."<sup>11</sup> Seurat was interested in Jules-Étienne Marey's photographic gun, which was related to inventions for motion study by Muybridge and Eakins in America. Degas was famous for using instantaneous stereo-camera shots to discover new attitudes to composition. But he was also aware of Muybridge's studies of movement and after 1880 "made clay studies and charcoal sketches of horses based on Eadweard Muybridge's chronophotographs,"<sup>12</sup> another link between Eakins and developments in France. Eakins, whose association with Muybridge's researches at the University of Pennsylvania in 1884 resulted in the invention of a camera with two disks in front of the lens, one revolving eight times faster than the other, has been credited by some scholars with anticipating the motion picture camera.<sup>13</sup>

Ultimately, the European artist seems to have benefited from the camera in a somewhat negative way. Once the photograph had “fixed” reality, the artist, liberated from that obligation, could become increasingly concerned with the reality of the picture. In America, however, given an indigenous conceptual and realistic bias, we can expect that the camera would and did have a different effect, functioning in a machine technology as another instrument to certify the outside world.

. . . Americans were enchanted by the veracity of the camera. The romantic Cole was one of the few painters who voiced strong reservations, considering the daguerreotype “a mechanical contrivance,” although even he felt the daguerreotype would have the virtue of revealing the insincerities of the superficial “painter of views.”<sup>14</sup> But Mount, Lane, Homer, Page, Healy, Church, Remington, Harnett, and Bierstadt (who especially used stereoscopic views) all seem to have made some use of the photograph not only as a study but as a model for paintings. The fundamental American attitude was perhaps best voiced by Theodore Robinson at the end of the century when he wrote, “Painting directly from nature is difficult as things do not remain the same, the camera helps to retain the picture in your mind.”<sup>15</sup> It was probably this devotion to the “picture” in the mind that first drew Eakins to photography as another device contributing to the clinical verism on which his art was founded.

The same instinct had attracted him earlier to the science of anatomy. . . .

Eakins objected to any surrogates that interposed themselves between the artist and reality, and he disliked the contemporary practice of teaching from plaster casts.<sup>16</sup> Like Greenough, he would have maintained that he contended only for Greek principles. He shared the Greeks’ admiration for the nude, and his admiration was not only aesthetic but functional. His anatomy classes at The Pennsylvania Academy and his photographic studies of athletes in motion served as tools to demonstrate what a machine the body was.

Even these instruments had to be checked against one another for accuracy. As Fairfield Porter has pointed out, Eakins had a “sensitive appreciation of the limitations of the camera as an instrument for discovering fact,” and he did a gray copy of his famous study of horses in action, *The Fairman Rogers Four-in-Hand* [A May Morning in the Park] “to be photographed in place of the original in full color, since before the invention of the

panchromatic film photography translated color values inaccurately.”<sup>17</sup> This recognition of the photograph as a convention like painting itself was an interesting insight on Eakins’s part at this time. But he was nonetheless rightly convinced of the importance of this new convention in analyzing motion. He fixed the physiology of motion in his photographs and analyzed the anatomy of motion on the dissecting table, thus studying both the exterior and interior mechanisms of living things. When he delivered his paper on horses before the Philadelphia Academy of Sciences, *On the Differential Action of Certain Muscles Passing More than One Joint*, he was merely demonstrating once again how his anatomical and photographic interests supported each other.

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- 1 See Lloyd Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins, His Life and Work* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1933), p. 21: “Even when Courbet and Manet, having been refused at the Universal Exposition of 1867, caused a furor by showing their work in a wooden shed outside the grounds, Eakins’s letters about the Exposition did not mention them; most of his space was devoted to the machinery, particularly the great American locomotive, ‘by far the finest there; I can’t tell you how mean the best English, French and Belgian ones are alongside of it.”
  
  - 2 Certain architectonic properties in Eakins’s art seem to demand deeper investigation as they connect to attitudes throughout the American tradition. Goodrich observes, in *Thomas Eakins, A Retrospective Exhibition*, catalogue of an exhibition at the National Gallery of Art, The Art Institute of Chicago, and the Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1961, p. 15: “In his early pictures the perspective was worked out in preliminary drawings as exact as those of an architect, using logarithms.” Fairfield Porter, in *Thomas Eakins* (New York: Braziller, 1959), p. 20, notes that for his painting of *The Concert Singer*, Eakins “posed the model in exactly the same position every day relative to a grid placed vertically behind her, with a place on the wall in front of her to look at. He attached colored ribbons to salient points of the dress corresponding to the points on the grid. The canvas was perpendicular to the floor and at right angles to the eye of the painter. The painting became a projection of the figure on a vertical plane, like an architect’s elevation.” There would seem to be a good case, in fact, for a study of the connections between the measured architectonic order of some American art and actual practical experience with the building art. Lane’s mensurational sense may well have derived in part from the practical architectural instincts that enabled him (along with his brother-in-law) to build his own home. Even within the Hudson River group, Jasper F. Cropsey did architectural drawings. See M. and M. Karolik *Collection of American Water Colors and Drawings 1800–1875* (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1962), I, 123, which notes: “At the age of twelve he showed mechanical skill and by using miniature home-made tools, constructed an elaborate model of a house on a platform three feet square, surrounded by a picket fence. Exhibited in 1837 at the Mechanics Institute Fair, it won him a diploma and brought him to the attention of Joseph Trench, an architect, who arranged to take him into his office for five years.” See *ibid.*, plate 62, *City House, Front Elevation* (cat. 219), and plate 63, *Design for Gilbert Elevated Railway* (cat. 227). Cole’s concern with architectural projects, as with the Ohio State Capitol, is well known.
  
  - 3 See Goodrich, *Eakins*, Whitney Museum, pp. 42–43, where Eakins is quoted: “A vessel sailing will almost certainly have three different tilts. She will not likely be sailing in the direct plane of the picture. Then she will be tilted over sideways by the force of the wind, and she will most likely be riding up on a wave or pitching down into the next one. Now the way to draw her is to enclose her in a simple brick-shaped form, to give in mechanical drawing the proper tilts, one at a time, to the brick form, and finally to put the tilted brick into perspective and lop off the superabounding parts. . . . I advise

- you to take a real brick or a pasteboard box of similar shape, and letter the corners, and keep it by you while you draw it." Goodrich comments, *ibid.*, p. 43: "His own system, however, was more advanced than this, making use of higher mathematics; as he went on to say: 'It is likely that an expert would not have got the tilts by drawing at all, but would have figured them out from trigonometric tables, but it is much easier for beginners to understand solid things than mere lines of direction.'"
- 4 *Ibid.*, p. 18.
  - 5 Porter, *op. cit.*, p. 20.
  - 6 Goodrich, *Eakins*, Whitney Museum, p. 42, quotes him: "I know of no prettier problem in perspective than to draw a yacht sailing. Now it is not possible to prop her up on dry land, so as to draw her or photograph her, nor can she be made to hold still in the water in the position of sailing. Her lines, though, that is a mechanical drawing of her, can be had from her owner or her builder, and a draughtsman should be able to put her in perspective exactly." Lane, it will be remembered, seems from present evidence to have inserted the boat into *Brace's Rock* at a later point, and to have used a photo of "Harvest Moon" in his drawing *Looking Up Portland Harbor*.
  - 7 Beaumont Newhall, *The Daguerreotype in America* (New York: Duell, Sloan & Pearce, 1961), p. 79.
  - 8 Newhall, *ibid.*, pp. 26-27, quotes Charivari for August 30, 1839: "You want to make a portrait of your wife. You fit her head in a fixed iron collar to give the required immobility, thus holding the world still for the time being."
  - 9 See Van Deren Coke, *The Painter and the Photograph* (Albuquerque, N.M.: University of New Mexico Press, 1964), p. 7, quoting Delacroix.
  - 10 *Ibid.*, p. 8.
  - 11 *Ibid.*, pp. 8, 9.
  - 12 *Ibid.*, p. 16.
  - 13 See especially Fairfield Porter, *op. cit.*, p. 15, pp. 116-17. See also William I. Homer and John Talbot, "Eakins, Muybridge, and the Motion Picture Process," *Art Quarterly*, XXVI, No. 2 (Summer 1963), pp. 194-216, where it is claimed that (p. 197) "Eakins's technique of recording overlapping images of a figure in motion on a single plate . . . had been utilized previously both by Muybridge and by the French physiologist Dr. Étienne-Jules Marey" and suggesting that, though Eakins might have improved on Marey's rotating disk by using two disks, the question remains of his original invention and the possibility that Muybridge had the two-disk camera first.
  - 14 Rev. Louis L. Noble, *The Course of Empire, Voyage of Life and Other Pictures of Thomas Cole, N.A.* (New York: Cornish, Lamport & Co., 1853), p. 282, reproduces a letter from Cole dated February 26, 1840, which states: "the art of painting is a creative, as well as an imitative art, and is in no danger of being superseded by any mechanical contrivance."
  - 15 Van Deren Coke, *The Painter and the Photograph*, p. 13.
  - 16 Mount, too, had disliked working from plaster casts. See Ms. Stony Brook (undated), where he states: "I say paint from the living, rather than from the plaster model."
  - 17 Porter, *op. cit.*, p. 15.



# Thomas Eakins and His Parisian Masters Gérôme and Bonnat

GERALD M. ACKERMAN, 1969

In discussing the career of Thomas Eakins (1843–1916), art historians have either neglected or ignored a normal practice. They have not investigated the influence of his teachers on his work.

Eakins studied in Paris from October 1866 to November 1869. He spent most of his time as a student in the official atelier of J. L. Gérôme, and the last months of 1869 in the independent atelier of Léon Bonnat. Both Bonnat and Gérôme were conscientious and able teachers.

Before Eakins left America for Europe in 1867, he had had a thorough training in traditional drawing techniques in Philadelphia, both in high school and at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. When he arrived in France, the government was in financial difficulties and the classes of the *Ecole des Beaux-Arts* had just been closed to foreign students. Nonetheless, Eakins took the drawing examination of the *Ecole*, passed it, and through his good French, energy, and a few connections in the city, was admitted to the advanced classes in the atelier conducted by Gérôme.

There is constant rhetorical speculation as to why Eakins chose Gérôme as his teacher, but no real thought about the matter. There seem to be two reasons for the lack of inquiry. One is the patriotic wish to characterize his work as purely American and free of foreign influence, the other is a snobbish incredulity that Eakins could have learned anything from a now unpopular academic master. In fact, some biographers can distort the evidence to make Eakins seem absolutely miserable under Gérôme's "pedantic" teaching; and others feel free to omit any mention of his second master, Léon Bonnat.<sup>1</sup> Eakins himself maintained a life-long loyalty to both of his Parisian masters. He praised them constantly, listed himself in exhibition catalogues as their student, followed their activities, and sent his own students to Paris to study with them.

If we look through a list of contemporaries of Gérôme whose works were displayed at the annual exhibitions of the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts while Eakins was a student there, the reasons why he picked Gérôme from among them for his teacher become apparent. Philadelphians at the time loved dramatic history pictures. In 1867 they bought, by public

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Gerald M. Ackerman, "Thomas Eakins and His Parisian Masters Gérôme and Bonnat," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 6th series, vol. 73 (1969): 235–56. Excerpts, 235–38, 240, 242, 249–50, 252–56. Reprinted by permission of the author.

subscription, Guastaldi's enormous *The Duke of Este Meditating the Death of his [unfaithful] wife Parisiana* which had been the most popular work at the two previous annual exhibitions. Guastaldi was a professor at the academy in Turin (1818–1889); his pretentiously life-sized figures grimace and sprawl through loosely painted drapery in an operatic manner.

Gérôme's *Egyptian Recruits Crossing the Desert* was loaned to the Academy exhibition in 1860, and again in 1861 and 1862. Compared to the history paintings, like Guastaldi's, which hung alongside it, this small work with its fine figures, objectively observed dust and sweat, controlled atmosphere and brilliant color must have seemed like a revelation to the young Eakins. A picture very similar to it had had Gérôme hailed as a leading young realist at the salon of 1859.<sup>2</sup> Eakins's native American dislike of pretension must have been reinforced by his Quaker practicality when he chose a master who painted both realistically and unpretentiously.<sup>3</sup>

When Eakins entered Gérôme's atelier, Gérôme had been a professor at the Ecole for only a short while. He was one of the new professors appointed during the reforms of the Comte de Nieuwerkerke in 1865.<sup>4</sup> The reform successfully raised the standards and the effectiveness of both the official and the independent ateliers, and Parisian training became famous throughout the world. Students flocked to Paris, and Parisian trained painters carried the thoroughness and sense of responsibility of their masters back to the academies of their home countries.<sup>5</sup> Eakins can be considered as one of the first to benefit by this reform and one of the first to bring its influence to America.<sup>6</sup>

## EAKINS WITH GÉRÔME

Readers of the old files of the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* are familiar, or can easily become familiar, with the career of Gérôme. His contemporary reputation as a traveller and ethnographic painter, rather than as an academician, his many Salon contributions, and his late turn to monumental sculpture are all recorded in articles and reviews throughout the 19th century numbers.

Only a few adulatory contemporary monographs, written for fans rather than critics, compete with the *Gazette* articles as sources of information about the artist. The author of this article has only recently published the first modern considerations of Gérôme's career, and of his relationship to the realists of his time.<sup>7</sup> At present his works are mainly in the basements of museums and in private collections, and it will take some effort to ferret out his major works for a show that will reestablish his reputation as an excellent genre and history painter.

Eakins's life in Paris and his stay with Gérôme are reported in a series of lively letters he wrote to members of his family. These are cited by Goodrich and reprinted at length in the rare, privately printed monograph by Margaret McHenry.<sup>8</sup> The letters describe the usual excitement at the entrance of a new member into an atelier, his initiation, and the daily routine. In with the news about expenses, lodging changes, and American visitors to Paris, occasional difficulties with his master are reported. "He has never been able to assist me much, and oftener bothered me by mistaking my troubles."<sup>9</sup> . . . [H]e complains that Gérôme took his brush from him and repainted a passage,<sup>10</sup> a freedom which he himself later took as a teacher.<sup>11</sup> In the face of his lifelong admiration of Gérôme, these remarks must be taken simply as outbursts of momentary pique, to be expected between student and teacher, and not as characteristic of their relationship. Eakins obviously wrote his letters to please and amuse his parents; . . .

After two years of study in the atelier of Gérôme, Eakins went to study for a short while in the independent atelier of Léon Bonnat.<sup>12</sup> Bonnat was then a young man, more famous as a rising realist than as the fashionable portrait painter which he became in the late 1870s. Nonetheless, his skill in portraiture was of great importance to Eakins's future career. Gérôme was an unwilling if fine portrait painter; it is highly likely that he recommended a period of study with Bonnat.<sup>13</sup> Both Eakins and Gérôme may have realized that once back in America, most of Eakins's commissions would be for portraits.

After he left Bonnat's studio, Eakins went for six months to Spain, and then he returned to America in the spring of 1870. He never returned to Europe. He had been ill during his last winter in Paris, and wanted to spend a winter in a mild climate before returning to America. Undoubtedly Bonnat's enthusiasm for Vélasquez<sup>14</sup> and Ribera made him eager to visit the museums of Spain, the Prado in particular. . . .

## EAKINS IN PHILADELPHIA

Once Eakins returned to Philadelphia, he kept close contact with his masters Gérôme and Bonnat. He wrote to them, and kept track of their activities and their new works, particularly those that came to America. At the same time he was busy preparing his own career. In the first few years here, he did not seem to paint very many pictures. The reason was probably because he was working in such a learned way, and each picture required studies and exacting preparatory sketches.<sup>15</sup>

In 1875, when he thought he had mastered one of the most difficult but favorite problems of perspective—a moving boat in water—he sent an example for approval to his old master, Gérôme. It was a water color of his friend, John Biglin, in a single scull. This water color is lost, perhaps it was destroyed by Eakins when Gérôme returned it, for the master suggested some changes. In a rather long and explicit critique, the master told his student that the moment was poorly chosen:

“. . . The individual who is well drawn in his parts lacks a total sense of movement; he is immobile, as if he were fixed on the water; his position, I believe, is not pushed far enough forward—that is, to the extreme limit of movement in that direction. There is in every prolonged movement, such as rowing, an infinity of rapid phases, and an infinity of points from the moment when the rower, after having leaned forward, pulls his upper body back as far as it will go. There are two moments to choose from for painters of our sort. The two extreme phases of action, either when the rower is leaning forward, the oars back, or when he has pushed back, with the oars ahead, you have taken an intermediate point, that is the reason for the immobility in the work.

“The general tone quality is very good, the sky is solid yet light, the depths well placed, and the water is executed in a charming fashion, very correct, which I couldn’t praise too much. What pleases me especially, and this in thinking of your future, is the mixture of well founded construction and honesty which dominate in this work.”<sup>16</sup>

Eakins was not chagrined by the letter. He kept it and exhibited it as a special prize especially the praise at the end. He started new boat studies, in accordance with his master’s instructions. Not only did he study live models, but he also looked carefully at his photograph of Gérôme’s *The Prisoner*.<sup>17</sup> In the new water color, which he sent to Gérôme—now in the Metropolitan Museum as *The Rower [John Biglin in a Single Scull]* (G. 57)—John Biglin is posed exactly like the Negro oarsman in the work by Gérôme.

Eakins was delighted with Gérôme’s praise for the new version: “Votre aquarelle est entièrement bien.”<sup>18</sup> When the picture was returned to him by Gérôme, he entered it in the Annual Exhibit of the American Society of Painters in Water Colors in New York, in the spring of 1874. Before the show opened, he proudly sent the letter from Gérôme to his friend, Earl Shinn, art critic of *The Nation*.<sup>19</sup> He evidently asked Shinn to use the praise of Gérôme to his advantage.<sup>20</sup> Letters by Eakins addressed to Shinn . . . show the continuing relationship of Eakins with his Parisian masters, and his preparations to enter pictures in the Salon of 1874. . . .<sup>21</sup>

April 13th. 1875  
1729 Mount Vernon St.  
Dear Earl,

. . . My letter to Gérôme & Billy [William Sartain] announcing having sent the pictures arrived but the box didn't come. As the time grew near for the last day of admittance to the salon, the anxiety increased. Gérôme himself feeryed [*sic*] and sent to all the depots and express companies to see where it was detained. Gérôme told Billy I was one of his most talented pupils and that he was most particularly anxious about me. At the last moment the box not arriving, Gérôme ordered the old ones at Goupil's to be sent. Next day, Billy went up to Gérôme's Sunday. The box had just arrived, and Gérôme was opening it. There were two decorated artists there friends of Gérôme that Billy did not know. Gérôme pitched into the water of the big one said it was painted like the wall also he feared (just fear) [*sic*] that the rail shooting sky was painted with the palette knife. The composition of this one they all found too regular. They all said the figures of all were splendid. The drifting race seemed to be liked by all very much. The nigger they had nothing against. Gérôme said he would put in the saloon [salon] the rail shooter and the drifting race as the jury had not yet passed on them and he thought he could easily change them in explaining why. Next time Billy went to Gérôme he said he had changed his mind that he would have the old ones in the saloon. They were not so good but the figures were larger, and Goupil wanted the four new ones for London.<sup>22</sup>

This London exhibition he seems to conceive of more importance & Billy thinks too that there is more chance there for such pictures. Gérôme said he was going to write me soon all he thought about my work. Billy himself had not yet written fully. It was only the little note sent me before a mail left.

Billy & Gérôme are very truthful so I am very elated for I see by their reception that my little works have produced a good impression. . . .

Thomas Eakins

I wouldn't send you such a damned egoist letter but  
I feel good and I know you will be pleased at my progress.

...

### EAKINS IN THE EUROPEAN TRADITION

Imitation has always been a part of western art. Eakins's masters, Bonnat and Gérôme borrowed freely, as we have seen, and openly imitated their favorite painters. Manet's borrowings are famous. When he took the fore-shortened figure of Gérôme's *Dead Caesar* (1859) and used it for his bullfighter in *The Incident in the Bullring* (1864), Gérôme never objected, even though the picture was discussed a great deal.<sup>29</sup> In an atmosphere where borrowing was allowed, the similarity of Eakins's invention to that of his masters does not take away from his importance or his originality. This similarity does, however, indicate that he considered himself as belonging to their school or tradition.

One reason that it has been hard to see Eakins as part of the tradition of his teachers is that the integrity of this tradition has never been recognized. It was a genre tradition supported by academically trained figure painters with aspirations as "realists."

For modern art historians, the only important direction of the 1860's and 1870's has been that of the Impressionist School. The genre and history painters of the period have been reclassified as "Impressionists," or declared unimportant as "outside the main stream of development." We have even managed to remove Degas and Manet from their circle of academic genre painting friends, and to force them uncomfortably into a place among the Impressionists. Not only Eakins, but Degas and Manet are better understood if we respect their choice of friends and themes more than our own prejudices, and associate them and their works with the figure and genre painters of their time, such as Alfred Stevens, Tissot, Gervex, Gérôme and Bonnat.

Eakins's subject matter shows continual relationship to the works of these painters. His *Pathetic Song* (G. 148, Corcoran Gallery, Washington, D.C.) and his *Concert Singer* are similar to Stevens' *Le Chant Passionné* (formerly in the Luxembourg). His *Gross Clinic* of 1875 (G. 88, [now Philadelphia Museum of Art and the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts], Philadelphia) precedes Gervex's once-famous *Le Docteur Péan enseignant à l'hôpital Saint-Louis sa découverte du pincement des vaisseaux* (formerly in the Luxembourg). . . .

Eakins's *Swimming Hole* [*Swimming*] (1883, G. 190, [now Amon Carter Museum], Fort Worth, Texas) was painted at the same time his master was turning to large bathing scenes (as in *Le Grand Bain à Brussa*, formerly in

the Hermitage) in the search for naturalistic and non-anecdotal scenes containing many nudes in action.

If we look at Eakins's career as an academician, we can see a close personal identification with his master, Gérôme. He taught the same subjects in a manner like his master. In the memoirs of their students, there are almost the same stories about Eakins as about Gérôme.<sup>24</sup> They were both thorough; both had a strong belief that they taught "drawing" and that composition and invention were something that the student picked up on his own.<sup>25</sup> They were both interested in photography and the way it revealed movement. Gérôme's description of the rower's movement in the letter to Eakins of 1873 reads like a blueprint for the photographic experiments which Muybridge and Eakins conducted (at times together) in the 1880's.<sup>26</sup> Gérôme was among the guests at Meissonier's house in 1881 when Governor Stanford and Muybridge demonstrated with lantern slides their photographs of galloping horses taken in California.<sup>27</sup> Both artists were fond of animals; they let pets, even monkeys and rats, overrun their houses and tables. Both excelled in the anatomy of the horse.

We should not underestimate the importance of the activities of Gérôme in Paris and Eakins in Philadelphia as teachers in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. They were not simply guarding the traditions and techniques of the past, but trying to adapt them to the realism of their time. By their example and by their teachings, they managed to keep alive skill in drawing of the human figure, and to encourage a love for genre in generations of French and American students.

In America, their students were the teachers of the artists of the twentieth century. They made genre painting and figure drawing a permanent part of the American tradition. As a result, American genre painting has twice been able to revive itself in the twentieth century, in the Regionalism and Socialist Realism of the thirties, and in the Pop Art of the early sixties.

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1 The most important monograph on Eakins is by Lloyd GOODRICH, *Thomas Eakins, his life and work*, New York, 1933. Goodrich mentions Bonnat in one short paragraph (p. 25). Margaret MCHENRY's *Thomas Eakins who painted*, Privately printed [Philadelphia], 1946, does not mention Bonnat. Nor do Fairfield PORTER (*Thomas Eakins*, New York, 1959) and Sylvan SCHENDLER (*Eakins*, Boston, 1967) in their monographs. Schendler and Porter both base themselves on Goodrich's information; his work remains the standard monograph. Paintings by Eakins will hereafter be identified according to Goodrich's catalogue numbers. A new edition of Goodrich's monograph is planned for 1970.

2 Henri ROUJON, *Artistes et amis des arts*, Paris 1919, p. 77.

- 3 Eakins probably also knew *The Guardian*, a small painting by Gérôme of an elaborately dressed eunuch guarding a harem entrance. This was given to the Academy in Philadelphia by Henry C. Gibson some time before 1858. The Wiltach Collection in Philadelphia owned, at that time *The Arab Chieftain before His Tent*.
- 4 For information on the several reforms in the academy system, see C. H. STRANAHAN, *A History of French Painting*, New York, 1902, 266 ff.
- 5 *Ibid.*, p. 273.
- 6 Eakins taught at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in Philadelphia from 1876 to 1886, and at the National Academy of Design in New York City from 1888 to 1894.
- 7 See especially, Charles TIMBAL, "Gérôme, Etude biographique," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 1876, 2, pp. 218 ff, and 344 ff; Emile GALICHON, "M. Gérôme, peintre ethnographe," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 1868, 1, pp. 147 ff, and 335 ff. For other basic bibliography see my article, "Gérôme and Manet," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 1967, 2, p. 175, note 7, to which must be added another article by me, "Gérôme, the Academic Realist," in *The Academy [Art News Annual XXXIII]*, 1967, pp. 100 ff.
- 8 MCHENRY, *Eakins*, pp. 1-16.
- 9 Letter cited in GOODRICH, *Eakins*, pp. 26 ff.
- 10 GOODRICH, *Eakins*, p. 17.
- 11 Charles BREGLER, "Eakins as a teacher," *The Arts*, XVIII, 1931, p. 29.
- 12 The bibliography on Bonnat is rather meager. We mention here the obituary by Léonce BÉNÉDITE, "Léon Bonnat," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 1923, 1, pp. 1-16; another obituary published with some other articles concerning Bonnat is in a pamphlet by René CEZACO, *Bonnat, L'homme et l'artiste*, Mont-de-Marsan, 1940. More interesting is a memoir by E. H. Blashfield, an American student of Bonnat in John C. VAN DYKE, *Modern French Masters*, New York, 1896, pp. 47-56. The most recent notice is in an introduction by Mme. BOUCHOT-SAUPICQUE to Jacob BEAN, *Les Dessins italiens de la collection Bonnat [Inventaire général des dessins des musées de province, 4]*, Paris, 1960.
- 13 E. H. BLASHFIELD relates how Gérôme recommended Bonnat to him as a teacher, and how Bonnat, in turn, recommended that he study with Gérôme. VAN DYKE, *Modern French Masters*, p. 47.
- 14 Léon BONNAT "Vélasquez," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 1898, 1, pp. 177-182. An English translation appears as the introduction to A. de BERUETE, *Vélasquez* [n. p.], 1906.
- 15 For an account of his working methods for one picture, *The Fairman Rogers Four-in-hand* of 1879, see Gordon HENDRICKS, "A May Morning in the Park," *Bulletin of the Philadelphia Museum of Art*, 49-64.
- 16 Gérôme, letter from Paris, May 10, 1873, quoted in French in GOODRICH, *Eakins*, p. 164, n. 55.
- 17 There are several postcard size Goupil photos of the works of Gérôme which once belonged to Eakins in the collection of Seymour Adleman of Philadelphia. They are all signed *Tom Eakins* in his youthful handwriting on the back.



- 18 Gérôme, letter from Paris, Sept. 18, 1874, as cited in GOODRICH, *Eakins*, p. 165, n. 60.
- 19 Earl SHINN (1838–1886) art critic for *The Nation* from 1868 to 1886. He was a native Philadelphian like Eakins, whom he had also known as a fellow student in Gérôme's classes in Paris. He also published under the name Edward Strahan. Under the name Shinn he published an important article on Eakins's teaching methods at the Pennsylvania Academy, "The art schools of Philadelphia," *Scribner's Monthly*, 1879, pp. 737–750.
- 20 Shinn quoted the last, most flattering paragraph of the letter from Gérôme of May 10, 1873, in his column in *The Nation*, vol. 18, 1874, p. 172. The context is interesting: "We learn that he [Eakins] is a realist, an anatomist, and a mathematician, that his perspective, even of waves and ripples, is practiced according to strict science; and that his teacher, M. Gérôme, praises his execution of water as being done in 'a charming, very strong style which I cannot eulogize too highly.'"
- 21 The letters are in the Cadbury Collection of the Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College, Pennsylvania. The director, Mr. Frederick B. Tolles, has kindly given me permission to cite and reproduce the letters in my text.
- 22 Two pictures were exhibited by Eakins at the Salon of 1875; both were entitled *Une Chasse aux Etats-Unis*. They were probably, as Goodrich suggests, G. 70, *Pushing for Rail* and G. 72, *Whistling for Plover*.
- 23 See ACKERMAN, "Gérôme and Manet."
- 24 An account by Charles BREGLER, "Thomas Eakins as Teacher," *The Arts*, vol. 17, 1931, pp. 384 ff, and vol. 18, 1931, p. 29 ff, reads almost like the accounts of Gérôme's teaching by his students in the biographies by Hering and Moreau-Vauthier.
- 25 "Je suis choisi [as a professor] pour apprendre l'orthographe aux jeunes gens, je leur dirai de regarder avant eux, a étudier la nature, a être sincères, a être naïfs, et de travailler," Gérôme as cited by ROUJON, *Artistes et amis des Arts*, Paris, 1919, p. 86. For Eakins's program, see the prospectus of the Pennsylvania Academy of Art, signed by Fairman Rogers, but traditionally ascribed to Eakins, printed as a flyer for the school. It is published in the *Pennsylvania Monthly* of 1881, and reprinted in part in MCHENRY, *Eakins*, pp. 43–47.
- 26 Note how Gérôme describes his study of horses at a race track: "Not without surprise I saw under each horse's body what had the effects of a revolving wheel. Said I to myself, 'I must try to represent that wheel'; and on my return home I made a series of sketches of the successive actions in a canter, from the fullest extension of the legs to the instant when they are gathered up under the horse. I traced my drawings, and laying the traces one above another, I had the exact effect." Cited by R. H. TITHERINGTON, "Jean Leon Gérôme," *Munsey's Magazine*, vol. 35, 1906, p. 286.
- 27 "Mr. Muybridge's photographs of animals in motion," *Scientific American Supplement*, vol. 13, 1882, p. 5058; this is an article by "X" reprinted from the *Paris American Register*.

# Eakins Watercolors

DONELSON F. HOOPES, 1971

[From the foreword by Lloyd Goodrich]

. . . Among the less familiar aspects of Eakins's art are his watercolors. We usually associate his name with the solidity and weight of his oil paintings. His watercolors, while equally characteristic, show a different side of his artistic personality. Though far fewer in numbers than his oils, they are completely realized works in every respect.

Soon after his return in 1870 from his three and a half years of study in Europe, Eakins began to use watercolor. Most of his twenty-six works in the medium were painted in the ten years from 1873 to 1882. In subject matter, they paralleled his oils of these years. There were scenes of the outdoor sports and activities that he himself enjoyed: rowing on the Schuylkill River, sailing on the Delaware, hunting in the Cohansey marshes in southern New Jersey. There were the shad fisheries at Gloucester, across the Delaware. There were indoor genre subjects picturing his family, friends, and pupils. In the late 1870's appeared a series of watercolors of women in old-fashioned dresses, sewing, knitting, and working at spinning wheels. . . .

Eakins's watercolors were far from the spontaneous, direct-from-nature works usual in the medium. They were as thoughtfully planned as his oils. As with the latter, the three-dimensional structure of the picture was often worked out in preliminary perspective drawings, such as the one for *John Biglin in a Single Scull*—drawings that have a precise beauty of their own. But though Eakins was a strong draftsman, strangely enough he made few drawings aside from his perspective studies. Instead, oil sketches in full color were painted directly from the subject, then squared off, and their forms transferred to the final surface. Even for his watercolors, his studies were in oil—a curious reversal of the usual procedure. (Winslow Homer, for example, often used his watercolors as source material for his oils.)

By these unorthodox methods, Eakins produced watercolors that were as finely designed and fully realized as any of his oils, and as complete works of art, allowing for differences in scale and complexity. The physical nature of the medium, of course, did not make possible the full substance and

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Donelson F. Hoopes, *Eakins Watercolors*, with foreword by Lloyd Goodrich (New York: Watson-Guptill, 1971). Excerpts, 6-7, 26, 28, 32. Copyright © 1971 by Watson-Guptill Publications. Used by permission of Watson-Guptill Publications, a division of Random House, Inc. Courtesy of the Eagle Hill Foundation, Steuben, Maine.

weightiness of oil; but in compensation, there were greater refinement and subtlety, and a higher, clearer range of color, thanks to the translucency of the water medium, with the white paper showing through.

Eakins himself evidently considered his watercolors equal to his oils; in the 1870's and early 1880's, he exhibited them extensively, not only in the annual shows of the American Society of Painters in Water Colors, but in other national exhibitions; and he priced them not much lower than his oils. It is significant that when in 1873 he wanted to show his revered master, Jean Léon Gérôme, what he had accomplished in America, he chose to send him a watercolor of a man rowing; and after receiving Gérôme's letter criticizing his attempt to represent full motion, he evidently painted a new version, also in watercolor, and sent it to Gérôme. . . .

Almost all of Eakins's watercolors were products of his early manhood—his late twenties and his thirties—and they have the varied subject matter and the healthy extroversion of those years. . . .

[Donelson F. Hoopes's text]

WHISTLING FOR PLOVER

1874

11 in. x 16 ½ in. (27.9 cm. x 41.9 cm.)

The Brooklyn Museum

While Gérôme was assisting Eakins in Paris—not only through constructive criticism, but also with his help in placing Eakins's work in collections and in the Salon exhibitions—another friend, Earl Shinn (1818–1880), was helping him in New York. Shinn was a native Philadelphian and he had also been a student of Gérôme in Paris. But most important, he was the art critic for *The Nation* between 1868 and 1886.

In January, 1875, Eakins wrote to Shinn from Philadelphia: "You will see in the watercolor exhibition [American Society of Painters in Water Colors] three little things of mine . . . a negro whistling for plover. This is the same subject as my oil and the selfsame Negro William Robinson of Backneck but in a different position. It is not near as far finished as the little oil one but is painted in a much higher key with all the light possible." The "little oil one" is a reference to an oil painting which Eakins sent to the Salon in Paris that year. The oil version was sold through Goupil, and its whereabouts are unknown today.

It is interesting to note that Eakins's letter refers to the watercolor as being painted "in a much higher key with all the light possible." The watercolor has an overall pearly light, achieved by a very high keyed color scheme. To judge from the letter, Eakins must have been looking for a means of painting light in a way he found impossible in oils. But because of his manner of working—with close attention to minute detail—the creation of a finished watercolor must have been extremely tedious. Even more than in the Biglin watercolor [*John Biglin in a Single Scull* (Metropolitan Museum)], Eakins seems to have depended on drawing, rather than on broad washes of color. The areas of local color are rendered with staccato touches of the brush. Eakins has taken Gérôme's idea about the phases of action in rowing, translating it into the terms of this picture. We are given a split second in time—the moment when the hunter utters a whistle to call the birds and is preparing to close his shotgun and aim at them. In a moment, he will rise from his crouching position and fire. The sense of expectation that this small image creates is extraordinarily powerful.

*Whistling for Plover* was one of the five works Eakins exhibited in the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia in 1876. Shortly thereafter, he presented the watercolor to a man he admired greatly, Dr. Silas Weir Mitchell (1829-1914) the Philadelphia physician, novelist, and poet.

#### STARTING OUT AFTER RAIL

1874

25 in. x 20 in. (63.5 cm. x 50.8 cm.)

Wichita Art Museum, Murdoch Collection

Two versions in oil preceded the watercolor that Eakins finally painted in 1874. The first version was a horizontal composition, rather sketchily painted. This he gave to his close friend, William Merritt Chase (1849-1916), in 1900. The second composition is identical with the watercolor, both in composition and in size. It was the second and more finished oil painting that Eakins sent to Goupil, his dealer in Paris, in 1874. The watercolor version, however, was exhibited at the Seventh Annual Exhibition of the American Society of Painters in Water Colors in New York, during the spring of 1874. In the exhibition catalog, Eakins identified the picture as *Harry Young, of Moyamensing, and Sam Helhower, "The Pusher," Going Rail Shooting [Starting Out after Rail]*. (A pusher is a poleman in a punt.) The watercolor was later shown at the 52nd annual exhibition of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in 1881.

The picture shows two of Eakins's friends setting out in a small cat-boat across the Delaware River to the hunting marshes in New Jersey. Eakins once remarked in a lecture: "I know of no prettier problem in perspective than to draw a yacht sailing. A vessel sailing will almost certainly have three different tilts. She will not likely be sailing in the direct plane of the picture. Then she will be tilted over sideways by the force of this wind, and she will most likely be riding up on a wave or pitching down into the next one." Nowhere is Eakins's interest in the subject better demonstrated than in this picture.

#### BASEBALL PLAYERS PRACTICING

1875

9  $\frac{3}{8}$  in. x 10  $\frac{1}{2}$  in. (23.8 cm. x 26.6 cm.)

Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design

In his letter of January, 1875, to his friend Shinn, Eakins commented further on his watercolors. About the baseball players practicing, he wrote: "The moment is just after the batter has taken his bat, before the ball leaves the pitcher's hand. They are portraits of athletic boys, a Philadelphia club. I can see that they are pretty well drawn. Ball players are very fine in their build. They are the same stuff as bullfighters only bullfighters are older and a trifle stronger perhaps. I think I will try to make a baseball picture someday in oil. It will admit a fine figure painting."

Here again, Eakins employs the same device we see in [*John Biglin in a Single Scull*] and [*Whistling For Plover*]: the placement of the central figures' heads near a continuous line. In the other pictures this was a horizon line, but here it is the railing in front of the bleacher seats. There is evidence that Eakins may have conceived this picture as a smaller one and then enlarged it in the process of painting. This is evident from the discontinuous color which can be noted at the left and right of the central portion of the picture. Since this work was one of those shown in the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia in 1876, Eakins presumably regarded it as finished in spite of its uncompleted appearance.

The source of the sunlight that illuminates the scene is low in the sky, creating the same dramatic shadows on the figures as in the *Biglin* watercolor. As in *Whistling for Plover*, figures are anticipating an event which takes place outside the picture. Such pictures are not discontinuous, but carry the viewer's imagination well beyond the borders of the composition.

# Walt Whitman and Thomas Eakins: Variations on Some Common Themes

HENRY B. RULE, 1974

## I

In the midst of the doubts and confusions of the post Civil War days, Walt Whitman dreamed of a band of brave, true men, "compact in soul, conscience-conserving, God-inculcating, inspired achievers, not only in literature, the greatest art, but achievers in all art." Their duty would be to accomplish for American democracy what the knights of old had accomplished for the feudal ages: a common set of images, symbols, fables, and, above all, an ideal of friendship that would act as a cohesive force in the sprawling, warring, materialistic world of America. "It is to the development, identification, and general prevalence of that fervid comradeship," Whitman said in his "Democratic Vistas," ". . . that I look for the counter-balance and offset of our materialistic and vulgar American democracy, and for the spiritualization thereof." But as Whitman looked around him in the year 1868, he could not see a single artist who expressed the American spirit and aspirations. "Do you term that perpetual, pistareen, paste-pot work, American art?" he asked. "I think I hear echoed as from some mountaintop afar in the west, the scornful laugh of the Genius of these States."

It was not until some twenty years later that Whitman, now old and sick, but still cheerful and hopeful, found his ideal artist-comrade. He found him not on some western mountaintop, but working quietly and productively in Philadelphia, just across the Delaware River from Whitman's own adopted city of Camden, New Jersey. He was Thomas Eakins, introduced to Whitman in 1887 by Talcott Williams, editor of the *Philadelphia Press* and one of Whitman's most devoted defenders. During the next four and half years until Whitman's death in 1892, Eakins painted the most beautiful of the many portraits of the poet, frequently visited with him, and even after his death served him by taking his death mask and acting in the capacity of pallbearer.

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Henry B. Rule, "Walt Whitman and Thomas Eakins: Variations on Some Common Themes," *Texas Quarterly* 17 (Winter 1974): 7-57. Excerpts, 7-12, 21-26, 29-33, 48-51, 55-56. Copyright © 1974 by the University of Texas Press. All rights reserved.

Springing from common American stock, vigorously masculine and fiercely independent, devoted to his art despite lifelong neglect by critics and the public, Eakins was just the man to inspire Whitman's loving admiration. After all, given the differences produced by the times in which they were born, they were remarkably alike in their backgrounds, careers, and aesthetic visions.

Like Whitman's, Eakins's ancestry was Scotch-Irish, English, and Dutch. Both men sprang from a line of sturdy working people—weavers, farmers, and cobblers—and there is a tinge of Quakerism in the backgrounds of both. Unlike Whitman's carpenter father, Eakins's father was a white-collar worker—the first produced by his family. He was a writing master, teaching the children of Philadelphia's bourgeois the fine, flowing, fanciful hand of the day, and engrossing deeds, diplomas, testimonials, and other documents. From his father, no doubt, Eakins received his artistic bent. The fathers of both men were freethinkers and Democrats. Due at least partly to the influence of their fathers, Whitman and Eakins were somewhat unusual among nineteenth century American creators in their freedom from religious orthodoxy; Eakins, however, seems to have lacked Whitman's interest in politics and social problems. Both men were devoted sons and brothers. Whitman until he was close to forty lived off and on with his parents, and Eakins, except for his student days and for one year after his marriage lived all of his life in his father's house.

The fidelity of each man to his art was reflected in his working environment. Eakins's large, bare studio, where to the dismay of certain female clients he worked in his undershirt, was cluttered with unfinished and rejected paintings, painting materials, and clay; and Whitman's upstairs room in his little house on Mickle Street was to everyone but himself a chaos of books, prints, memoranda, letters, manuscripts stacked on tables and chairs and piled in great mounds on the floor which no maid or housekeeper was allowed to touch. Each had a large circle of friends from all classes and occupations, few of whom were artist types. Eakins's close relationship with his former student, Samuel Murray, who worked in the same studio with him for many years, reminds one of Whitman's relationship with Horace Traubel, who during the last years of the poet's life acted as his fund raiser, propagandist, nurse, and Boswell. Although Eakins married at the age of forty after his father warned him about the dangers of playing the field too long, and Whitman remained a bachelor despite a number of fervent female admirers, both men on their deepest emotional levels were married to their art.

Whitman was strongly drawn to Eakins's unconventional, independent, masculine character. In his poetry and prose, Whitman often attacked polite conformity in American literature and art, and Eakins once exclaimed to his art class, "Respectability in art is appalling!" Disliking arty language, Eakins preferred "workshop" to "studio," "painter" to "artist," and "naked" to "nude." He seldom used the word *beauty*. When a woman painter showed him a sentimental picture, he said sarcastically, "That's beautiful." When asked if Eakins wore well, if he was "a good comrade," Whitman answered, "He does; he is; he has seen a great deal; he is not ready to tell it, but is full, rich when drawn upon; has a dry, quiet manner that is impressive to me, knowing as I do, its background." In reply to the accusation that Eakins lacked "the social gifts," that he was "uncouth, and boorish," Whitman said:

The parlor puts quite its own measure upon social gifts.  
I should say that Tom Eakins lacks them as, for instance,  
it would be said that I lack them; not that they are forgotten,  
despised, but that they enter secondarily upon the affairs  
of my life. . . .

Eakins's honesty and directness, qualities which Whitman admired in both the man and his art, seem to have been innate. . . .

Unconventional, muscular, manly, Eakins was the ideal American that Whitman—the "teacher of athletes"—celebrated in his poetry. Eakins's paintings of scullers, baseball players, wrestlers, and boxers testify to his admiration of athletes. One boxing picture—*Between Rounds* (1899)—reveals unmistakably the bearded visage of Whitman peering eagerly over the balcony rail at the spectacle below. It is doubtful that the poet could have been lured to a boxing match at the time he knew Eakins—crippled and ill as he was—especially when it is recalled that many years before he had frequently denounced boxing in the columns of the Brooklyn *Daily Eagle*. But perhaps the painter was simply remembering Whitman's line in "A Song of Joys" (l. 22): "O the joy of the strong-brawn'd fighter, towering in the arena in perfect condition, conscious of power, thirsting to meet his opponent."

With his stout, bear-like figure, his rumpled, iron-gray hair, his grizzled mustache and beard, his thick, sensuous underlip, Eakins was a man whose physical presence made timid and conventional people uncomfortable. Sometimes he would stare straight at a person who interested him—painting him, as his friends would say. One lady who was disconcerted by the gaze of his large, bold eyes asked, "Mr. Eakins, why do you look at me like that?"



"Because you are beautiful," he replied in his high gentle voice. Whitman also had a high, musical voice that contrasted strangely with his big-boned, majestic body. In Eakins's portrait of Whitman—shirt opened, leaning nonchalantly back, his flowing yellow-white hair and beard setting off beautifully his ruddy complexion—did the painter intend an ironic touch in that spotlessly white collar trimmed with dainty lace? Each man possibly saw in the other a delicate, artistic soul hidden beneath an athletic form.

Neither of these "inspired achievers"—perhaps the greatest that America has produced in their fields—swam with the current of their times. "Inspired achievers" seldom do. The realism combined with psychological depth that characterizes the work of both men placed them generations in advance of the thin sentimentality and imitative romanticism of the popular poets and painters of their times. Their determination to present the whole of life—the ugly, the shocking, the sexual as well as the conventionally beautiful—made them seem like dangerous outlaws to that portion of Victorian American society that read poetry or looked at pictures. Eakins, however, lacked the genius for self-publicizing that enabled Whitman to gain a small but world-wide audience before his death. As Whitman's fame increased, Eakins became more and more the obscure provincial. Rejected by official institutions, rich patrons, leading critics, and the general public, he was practically unknown to the respectable society of Philadelphia. . . .

Whitman and Eakins failed to become popular because they refused to exchange popular appeal for artistic integrity. They rejected the advice of friends and newspapers, the lure of money, power, and fame, for a single-hearted devotion to their art. They were true professionals—rare birds in the Gilded Age, almost alone. . . .

Whitman also adhered to his own professional standards. Although he accepted the financial contributions of his friends as a loving expression of comradeship, he never wrote poetry except for publication and payment. . . .

### III

. . . The poet and the painter were unique in their age in their passion to recreate the near, the commonplace, without false sentiment or ornamentation. The world is beautiful in itself, pregnant with mystery and meaning, they felt, if the artist can present it truly, without idealization. The great poet "judges not as the judge judges, but as the sun falling around a helpless thing," Whitman declared in a line that reminds one of some of Eakins's masterworks. Eakins was one of the most uncompromising realists in the history of art. Every scene, every portrait, every figure was real, untouched by sentimentality. . . .

Both men felt the physical world in their bones, saw it in the round, its pain and its joy.

Above all, these devotees of the real were determined to avoid mere prettiness or ornamentation. As Whitman said in his preface to the first edition of *Leaves of Grass*:

The greatest poet has less a marked style . . . He swears to his art, I will not be meddlesome, I will not have in my writing any elegance or effect or originality to hang in the way between me and the rest like curtains. I will have nothing hang in the way, not the richest curtains. What I tell I tell for precisely what it is. . . .

Probably it was this sham “elegance or effect or originality” that Eakins once saw in a painting by Whistler of a little girl. While he was studying the picture, a friend asked his opinion. “I think it is a very cowardly way to paint,” Eakins replied. But, asked the friend, did it not have charm and beauty? Eakins, turning back to the picture, said that he had not thought of that. The mind of the artist, both men agreed, must be a clear and exact mirror of reality. “Cheap looking glasses and nearly all pictures distort things from the unerring harmony and equilibrium of nature,” wrote Whitman in a notebook during the gestation period of *Leaves of Grass*. . . .

Whitman’s preference for untempered reality was so strong that he often liked photographs better than paintings: “. . . they are perhaps mechanical, but they are honest. The artists add and deduct: the artists fool with nature—reform it, revise it, to make it fit their preconceived notion of what it should be.” Eakins, a devoted amateur photographer, would have agreed. “The big artists,” he wrote to his father, “were the most timid of themselves and had the greatest confidence in nature.” Believing like Whitman that the artist should put “creeds and schools in abeyance,” Eakins as a teacher led his students to concentrate on the reality in front of them—usually a nude human figure—and he refused to indoctrinate them with artistic theories.

#### IV

Whitman and Eakins were unusual in their time and place in their conviction that the human body, undraped and unidealized, is a fit subject for art. In an age when plaster casts in art schools were decorously covered with cloth in preparation for the visits of ladies, they committed the horrendous sin of presenting to public view realistic and detailed portraits of human nakedness. Sometime before the first edition of *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman wrote in his

notebook a scornful comment on the prudery of the age: "Most of what is called delicacy is filthy or sick and unworthy of a woman of live rosy body and a clean affectionate spirit." Earlier, while a reporter on the New Orleans *Daily Crescent*, he had attacked that same squeamishness when he defended a "Model Artists" show, consisting of semi-nude actors posing in imitation of famous works of art: "They say the sight of such things is indecent; if that be so, the sights of nearly all the great works of painting and sculpture—pronounced by the united voice of critics of all nations to be masterpieces of genius—is, likewise, indecent. It is a sickly prudishness that bars all appreciation of the divine beauty evidenced in Nature's cunningest work—the human frame, form and face." . . .

Eakins detested prudery quite as much as did Whitman. In a letter to his father while he was a student in Paris, he satirized the current attitudes toward the nude:

The French court has become very decent since Eugenia had fig leaves put on all the statues in the Garden of Tuilleries. When a man paints a naked woman he gives her less than poor Nature did. I can conceive of few circumstances wherein I would have to paint a woman naked, but if I did I would not mutilate her for double the money. She is the most beautiful thing there is—except a naked man, but I never yet saw a study of one exhibited. It would be a godsend to see a fine man painted in a studio with bare walls, alongside of the smiling, smirking goddesses of many complexions, amidst the delicious arsenic green trees and gentle wax flowers and purling streams a-running up and down hills, especially up. I hate affectation.

In his classes, Eakins changed models as much as possible, because, as he said, "there is as much difference in bodies as in faces, and the character should be sought in the complete unity." Whitman expressed the same concept of character in the opening lines of *Leaves of Grass*:

Of physiology from top to toe I sing,  
Not physiognomy alone nor brain alone is worthy  
for the Muse,  
I say the Form complete is worthier far,  
The Female equally with the Male I sing.

Believing that character is revealed in “physiology from top to toe,” Eakins often asked his female sitters if they would pose for him in the nude, but few consented. According to one female sitter who posed for him at about the age of twenty, Eakins said to her: “You have a nice back—much like that of a boy. I would like to paint you in the nude.” When the girl sought advice from her mother, the mother revealed herself as a captive of the mores of her time: “My mother did not forbid it, but said it would be better not to on the whole, and that Eakins was somewhat hipped on nudes.”

The rebellion of Whitman and Eakins against American Puritan attitudes concerning the body was not merely theoretical; they were willing to suffer the consequences of acting on their beliefs. Attacked as obscene by the religious press, fired from his clerkship in the Department of the Interior because Secretary James Harlan considered his book immoral, and finally “banned in Boston,” Whitman with the Dutch obstinacy of which he was so proud, continued to celebrate that sexuality on which, as he said, “all existence, all souls, all realization, all decency, all health, all that is worth being here for, all of woman and of man, all beauty, all purity, all sweetness, all friendship, all strength, all life, as immortality, depend.” Perhaps his hardest test came when he had to resist the criticism of his friend Ralph Waldo Emerson. In his open letter to Emerson, which served as the preface to the 1856 edition of *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman had struck at the “filthy law” that silences artists on a serious treatment of sex and called for “perfect faith” in the subject. . . .

Eakins was an even greater victim of decadent American Puritanism than was Whitman. As professor of drawing and painting at the Pennsylvania Academy, Eakins was revolutionary in his substitution of the nude model for the antique plaster casts. To critic William C. Brownell Eakins explained his theories:

I don't like a long study of casts, even of the sculptors of the best Greek period. At best they are only imitations, and an imitation of imitations cannot have so much life as an imitation of nature itself. The Greeks did not study the antique; the *Theseus* and *Illysis* and the draped figures in the Parthenon pediment were modelled from life undoubtedly. And nature is just as varied and just as beautiful in our day as in the time of Phidias.

His Grecian delight in the beauty of the body inevitably led him into conflict with the mores of his day. . . . Some of the more daring girls in his classes,

apparently with Eakins's encouragement, were photographed in the nude. He insisted that male and female professional models pose together for purposes of comparison. The climax to these scandalous occurrences came when he removed the loincloth from a male model to demonstrate the pelvis before female students. This was too much for the rulers of the Academy, and they gave him the choice of restricting the use of nude models or resigning. Eakins's answer was that he would remain only on condition that he could have freedom to teach as he saw fit. The result was that, after ten years of teaching at Pennsylvania Academy, Eakins resigned on February 13, 1886. His reputation never recovered from the blow. Like Whitman, he preferred to sacrifice his reputation to his principles. . . .

Because of its severely naturalistic depiction of a group of male figures, Eakins's *The Swimming Hole* [*Swimming*] (1883) was even more shocking to his contemporaries than were his William Rush paintings. The swimmers in the painting were portraits of real men—friends or pupils of the artist painted from wax figurines and photographs. Eakins himself is seen breast stroking in the right foreground. His red setter Harry is also seen enjoying the swim.

Nude swimming for Eakins and Whitman was one of the joys of life. According to Lloyd Goodrich, whose *Thomas Eakins* is the source of most of the biographical facts concerning Eakins in this study, Eakins would strip off and go swimming “at every opportunity, without worrying about the sense of propriety of those who might see him, for he was as natural and unashamed about nakedness as a child or a savage, liking to swim, sail, and bask in the sun nude.” Combining two of Whitman's greatest passions—cleanliness and exercise—swimming is a frequent topic in the poet's notebook. As a boy, he loved to swim alone along the bare, unfrequented shore of Coney Island, after which he would “race up and down the hard sand, and declaim Homer or Shakspeare [*sic*] to the surf and sea-gulls by the hour.” Many years later, he attributed his partial recovery from his paralytic stroke of 1873 to his bathing in the nude in Timber Creek—thereby scandalizing nearby neighbors—as he sang airs from his favorite operas and, again, declaimed from Homer and Shakespeare.

Eakins's picture of naked men against a background of luxuriant summer foliage, reclining in the sun, diving in the blue-green water, and loafing and swimming in friendly communion, is like scenes in *Leaves of Grass*: the “Twenty-eight young men”—“all so friendly”—who “bathe by the shore” in “Song of Myself” (ll. 199–200); the “splash of swimmers and divers” as they “cool the warm noon” in the same poem (l. 769); and “the swimmer naked in the swimming bath, seen as he swims through the transparent green-shine,” in “I Sing the Body Electric” (l. 19). But the mood and content of Eakins's

picture bring most forcefully to mind the pond imagery in Whitman's "Calamus" poems—those poems celebrating comradeship or manly attachment. The pond in these poems is a hidden place, "far, far in the forest," separated "from the clank of the world," where the poet finds himself surrounded by his "dear friends." It represents that secret place deep in man's soul, where the restraints of civilized convention drop away, and the emotional flow between friends is unhampered. The pond in the "Calamus" poems is the font where men are baptized in the religion of loving comradeship. The rhythmical pyramid of bodies in Eakins's picture symbolizes perfectly Whitman's meaning.

Thus Eakins insisted on painting real men and women in a state of nakedness in an age when the ideal of human beauty was the Gibson Girl—her waist no larger than the span of a man's hand, her long elegant neck pinnacled by her small haughty head, her bosom encased in bone, and her heavy satin train trailing on the rich carpet. Cool, distant, polished, untouched by such grimy actualities as sex, she was a type of heroine found in the novels of William Dean Howells and Henry James, and exhibited in the portraits of Sargent, Abbott Thayer, and John W. Alexander. She had not, as Henry Adams said, "a feature that would have been recognized by Adam. The trait was notorious and often humorous, but anyone brought up among Puritans knew that sex was sin." At the same time that Thomas Eakins in his studio in Philadelphia was attacking American ideas of shame and delicacy, Henry Adams in his Washington study was engaged in the same enterprise. When Adams asked himself "whether he knew of any American artist who had ever insisted on the power of sex, as every classic had always done," only Walt Whitman came to his mind "and one or two painters, for the flesh tones." Of course, Adams could not be blamed for not knowing the work of Eakins; few people penetrated the wall of silence that surrounded him. Today, however, when every school girl reads *Leaves of Grass*, Eakins's pictorial representations of the beauty and innocence of the body can be seen as brilliant and poignant achievements. They seem to plead with us in much the same tone as Whitman's lines:

Touch me, touch the palm of your hand to my body  
as I pass,  
Be not afraid of my body.

## V

In addition to Whitman's realism and naturalism (especially as revealed in the unadorned facts of the human body), Eakins must have been drawn to

the poet's passionate nationalism. The art of both expressed an American sense of life that to their contemporaries seemed vulgar and inartistic. Great American literature, Whitman declared in the 1855 "Preface," must adhere to "American Standards"—that is, those achievements that distinguish America from Europe, particularly the elevation of the American common man and progress in American science and technology. In his old age, Eakins advised young art students who wished "to assume a place in the history of the art of their country" that "their first desire should be to remain in America, to peer deeper into the heart of American life, rather than to spend their time abroad obtaining a superficial view of the art of the Old World." Both men believed that the American artist should reject European models and traditions, that the new world should originate a new art based on the here and now. . . .

American art especially differs from European art, Whitman felt, in its respectful treatment of the common man. The point made clear in a review that Whitman wrote for the *New York Post* on February 1, 1851, about the newly established Brooklyn Art Union. In this review, Whitman expressed his particular admiration for Walter Libby's *Boy with a Flute* because of its "Americanism": "Abroad, a similar subject would show the boy as handsome, perhaps, but he would not be a young boor, and nothing more," Whitman wrote. "The stamp of class is, in this way, upon all the fine scenes of the European painters . . . while in this boy of Walter Libby's there is nothing to prevent his becoming a President, or even an editor of a leading newspaper." . . . Whitman and Eakins believed . . . that the fresh, natural response of uneducated people to art was more reliable than the tired, overly refined reaction of sophisticates. "The proof of a Poet," Whitman declared at the end of the 1855 "Preface," "is that his country absorbs him as affectionately as he has absorbed it." Or as Eakins put the same idea, "The working people from their close contact with physical things are apt to be more acute critics of the structural qualities of pictures than the dilettanti themselves." . . .

## VIII

. . . *Max Schmitt in a Single Scull* [*The Champion Single Sculls*] (1871) is Whitmanesque in its content and theme while exhibiting a change in mood as a result of the challenges of Eakins's age. . . . [T]he strict scientific technique with which Eakins created this painting resulted in psychological insights into the postwar era.

After making mechanical drawings of the boats, cars, and bridges, Eakins used trigonometry to place them into accurate perspective. He then transferred sketching in the landscape and figures. Next he built a model scull from a cigar box in order to experiment with the effects of light and

shade in the sunshine. Finally he began to paint, using thick pigments for details in the foreground and transparent glazes for lights and shadows in the distance. . . . But this painting is more than an illusion of reality.

. . . As the scull glides on the water, Max Schmitt in a magic moment pauses in his rowing, transfers the oars to one hand, places the other hand on his knee, turns, and looks at us. As our eyes are drawn to his pensive gaze suggests Whitman's line, "and you that shall cross from shore to shore / years hence are more to me, and more in my meditations, than you might suppose." All of the details of the painting—the stress on time, the movement of the boat across the stream, the hypnotic stare of Max Schmitt into our eyes—illustrate the philosophical theme of Whitman's "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," the annihilation of time and space:

I am with you, you men and women of a generation,  
or ever so many generations hence,  
Just as you feel when you look on the river and sky, so I felt,  
Just as you are refresh'd by the gladness of the river and the  
bright flow, I was refresh'd.

. . . [T]he solitude of the individual is strongly emphasized in this picture. In Whitman's poem, however, teeming multitudes throng his symbolic ferry as they move from birth to death across the stream of time "On the ferryboats the hundreds and hundreds that cross, returning home, are more curious to me than you suppose." A large stretch of water separates Eakins from his friend in the picture, but in "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," Whitman is surrounded by friends calling his name as he passes, placing their arms about his neck as he stands, or leaning against him as he sits. Whitman depicts swarms of people living in a state of warm camaraderie; Eakins presents the solitary individual gazing across a great distance at his friend.

A strange immobility augments the mood of melancholy in Eakins's picture. In Whitman's poem, all is in a state of motion: "the current rushing" their bodies "so swiftly and swimming with me far away," "the pouring-in of the flood-tide, the falling-back to the sea of the ebb-tide," the sea gulls "oscillating their bodies" as they soar, the vapor as it flies "in fleeces tinged with violet," the "frolicsome" play of the waves, the vessels coming into and leaving the bay, "the sailors at work in the rigging or out astride the spars," etc. But in Eakins's picture, all is stationary. Rowers seem transfixed, as if in a dream, one with oars at rest, the other balanced in mid-motion. Hardly a ripple mars the surface of the stream, and the trees are still against the sky. Whereas



Whitman's poem gives the impression of life ebbing and flowing with universal currents, Eakins's picture communicates a sense of powerlessness as if all the world were in a state of stasis.

The appearance of immobility in Eakins's picture is partly the result of a rigid geometric pattern. Horizontal parallel and intersecting lines are formed by the oars and hulls of the boats, the dark streaks on the water, the shore and line of trees on the right, the bridges in the distance, and the clouds in the sky. Perpendicular parallel lines are produced by the body of Max Schmitt, the trees, and the pillars of the bridge. The complicated geometric pattern is duplicated in miniature by the distant grillwork on the sides of the bridges. Boats, figures, and landscape seem to be held captive in a net of straight lines.

In contrast to Eakins's lineal imagery, the circle is the central geometric figure in Whitman's poem: "the slow wheeling circles" of the birds, "the fine centrifugal spokes of light round the shape of my head in the sunlit water," "the round masts, the swinging motion of the hulls," "the quick tremulous whirl of the wheels," etc. The circle is remindful of the free flowing cycles of existence—birth and death, day and night, the progression of the seasons, the pulsations of blood, the rise and fall of the tide. Eakins's grid-like pattern of parallel and intersecting straight lines, on the other hand, may be viewed as a metaphor for the iron web of scientific laws that in the age of Mark Twain, Henry Adams, and Thomas Eakins produced feelings of alienation and helplessness. Another symbol of the age is the tiny steamboat seen in the far distance, its puff of white smoke bisecting the bridges, ominously and inevitably approaching the still waters and motionless figure of Max Schmitt in the foreground. . . .

## IX

It is not surprising, considering their similar temperaments, backgrounds, and aesthetics, that the works of Whitman and Eakins form a remarkably coherent whole. It is doubtful that either directly influenced the art of the other, since Whitman's best work had been completed when Eakins began to paint, and it is not clear when Eakins first read Whitman's poetry. The fervent nationalism and the determination to tell the truth about their worlds can be detected in the earliest mature work of both men. These tendencies were probably reinforced in Eakins when he saw the paintings of Vélazquez in Spain during his student days, just as the same inclinations may have been brought to a "boil" in Whitman when he read Emerson while working for his father as a carpenter. The purpose of this essay, therefore, has not been to

prove cross-fertilization, but to show, first of all, how these two spiritual comrades, nineteenth century America's greatest poet and painter, acted as a commentary on each other.

A second objective, more difficult to prove since it depends on one's emotional rather than intellectual responses to art, is to emphasize those thematic variations that reveal changes in American attitudes before and after the Civil War. It is impossible to determine how consciously aware an artist might be in imbuing his work with the feelings of his age, particularly when he is as taciturn concerning his art as was Eakins. All men are more or less unconscious of the extent to which they are captives of their age and place. This essay, however, goes on the assumption that the difference between artist and other men is that the artist is necessarily more sensitive to the emotional currents of his environment. It is this sensitivity combined with a passion to express what he sees and feels that makes the artist. Together, one in words and the other in paints, Whitman and Eakins present the most probing and poignant record that we have of the movement of the inner life of nineteenth century America from cosmic optimism to scientific doubt, from romantic hopes to anguished disillusionment.

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# Peale, Quidor, and Eakins: Self-Portraiture as Genre Painting

JOHN WILMERDING, 1975

Ordinarily, one thinks of portraiture as a rather straightforward category of painting. The emphasis is clearly on the sitter or sitters, alone or in groups, surrounded by artifacts, accessories, or identifiable settings which are included primarily to enhance or accent the figural subject. Often more interesting is the subcategory of self-portraiture, wherein artists consciously or unconsciously reveal themselves, in whole or in part, their surface physiognomies or their inner psychological traits. Because of the processes involved, self-examination and confrontation, we are usually given a distinctive intimacy, a special perception, by the artist. Perhaps he will reflect this in a more informal pose, casual composition, unusual lighting effects, or unexpected auxiliary details.

The history and examination of self-portraiture, like autobiography, is surely an intriguing, if monumental, subject in its own right. Even the topic of self-portraits by American artists is too large and diverse to undertake here, although it is a subject that invites comprehensive study. One fascinating modification or amplification of American self-portraiture is its occasional mergence with the area of genre painting. Three painters attract particular attention in this regard for their unusual inventiveness and insight in the ways they paint themselves in the context of broader anecdotal, narrative, or historical subject matter. . . .

. . . Toward the end of the century, Thomas Eakins (1844-1916) turned increasingly toward portraiture in the latter part of his career. Not only was his concentration on portrait painting a reflection of his profound concern with humanity, but it was also an act of continual self-definition. His portrait of others tell us as much about himself as about the sitter. . . .

Alienation also shrouded the life of Thomas Eakins. His art, like that of his contemporary, Winslow Homer, was firmly rooted in the American genre tradition. But in contrast to painters such as Mount, Bingham, and even Quidor, he reaches a new and deeper level of seriousness. . . .

Returning to the United States shortly after [visiting Spain in 1870], Eakins began a series of interior paintings of his sisters and his fiancée at the piano or seated in chairs. From the beginning his art would show a dual

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John Wilmerding, "Peale, Quidor, and Eakins: Self-Portraiture as Genre Painting," *Art Studies for an Editor: 25 Essays in Memory of Milton S. Fox* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1975), 291-301. Excerpts, 291, 292, 298-300. Reprinted by permission of John Wilmerding and Harry N. Abrams Publishers.

central attention to light and to the human figure. The first was an ambience of affection which surrounded and defined the fragile truths of human character. Strongly present, of course, in these sympathetic records were the artist's own personality and perceptions. Others often provided Eakins with a mirror of himself, in the sense that the human condition was ultimately a profound understanding of self. Like [C. W.] Peale, Eakins began and ended his career painting his family and close friends, for in them he could most resolutely face mortal truths and record them on canvas.

Eakins's earliest self-portraits appropriately appear in the backgrounds of his genre paintings of friends. These were the splendid rowing scenes of the early 1870s, *Max Schmitt in a Single Scull* [*The Champion Single Sculls*] (The Metropolitan Museum of Art) and *The Biglin Brothers Turning the Stake* (The Cleveland Museum of Art). His presence in a second single scull, looking back at us from the distance, provides a signature that is both metaphoric and literal. The careful drawing and placement of figures in space combined with the radiance of sunlight are the fused legacy of his Parisian and Spanish experiences. Eakins not only paints himself bodily into such pictures, he does so spiritually as well, for these are testaments to youthful endurance and human survival. He equates the discipline of rowing with strength of character. He, Schmitt, and the Biglins are in the prime of life, which is both the triumph and poignancy of mortality. Ultimately, Eakins makes us aware of time that is both stopped for the moment and suspended forever. Time implies age: in the passage of summer to autumn, noon to afternoon, youth to old age, the nineteenth to the twentieth century.

These are the understated themes of his marsh scenes, too. *The Artist and His Father Hunting Reed-Birds on the Cohansey Marshes* is an outdoor portrait, wonderfully fresh and intimate yet in no way sentimental. The two men contrast in their age and posture—the one physically straining, caught off balance; the other thoughtfully concentrating, poised—yet both united by bonds of love and activity. Finally, the peaceful expanse of landscape and warm sunlight complete the harmonious order of the whole. Just as Peale and Quidor had discovered before him, Eakins required more than an isolated self-portrait to convey the largeness of his perceptions about self. Genre painting paradoxically allowed his introspective vision to render the outer world with unique comprehension.

The balance of thought and action, survival, of intelligence and emotion . . . was at the heart of his greatest painting, *The Gross Clinic* of 1875

([now Philadelphia Museum of Art and the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts]). Intended for the Philadelphia Centennial the next year, it was inadequately shown and poorly received, bringing great disappointment to the artist. Its vivid details and harsh realism, dramatically isolated by the Rembrandtesque lighting, offended genteel Victorian society and marked the beginning of the mutual disaffection between artist and public during the next decade. For in spite of *The Gross Clinic*'s rejection, Eakins the same year began his prominent teaching and directorial career at the Pennsylvania Academy only to be dismissed from this position in 1886 because of his conflicts in social, moral, and artistic attitudes with his patrons.

This crucial period in Eakins's life must have been one of building personal tensions. We find some of them in *William Rush Carving His Allegorical Figure of the Schuylkill River*, painted in 1877. Rush was a familiar and respected Philadelphia sculptor of the early nineteenth century, and Eakins sought to show that the earlier artist's depiction of a model from life was a prudent and discreet precedent for his own life classes. Two observers are present to insure the dignity of the proceedings: Rush's sculptured figure of George Washington (who was also a friend of Rush), and the model's chap-erone seated and preoccupied with her knitting. That Eakins had very much in mind the constraints and paradoxical suppressions of contemporary society is clear from the primary juxtaposition he makes of the strongly tactile nude figure and her elaborate pile of clothing in the center of the composition. Both are more precisely drawn and intensely lit than anything else in the painting. No doubt the features of the carver in the background loosely resemble those of Rush, but not surprisingly they also suggest the general demeanor of Eakins. More importantly, Eakins found in the subject of Rush and his carving of the nude another vehicle for the realization of his own condition. As such, the genre portrait of Rush became his own, in the same way Quidor intuitively found in Rip Van Winkle the image of himself. Eakins must have had such a transposition in mind, for he returned to the Rush theme in other versions (The Brooklyn Museum; The Honolulu Academy of Arts) at the end of his unhappy career.

One other painting of nude figures included Eakins's self-portrait, *The Swimming Hole* [*Swimming*], 1883. The artist and his dog Harry are swimming in from the lower right toward the group. This celebration of man in nature recalls his friend Walt Whitman's poem "Twenty-Eight Young Men Bathe by the Shore" from *Leaves of Grass*; a few years later, after his dismissal

by the authorities of the Pennsylvania Academy, Eakins painted the poet's portrait with the vitality and sympathy of a shared spirit. Meanwhile, *The Swimming Hole* was the culmination of a type he had begun with his early rowing scenes. The diving figure caught in mid-air reminds one even more of the photographic vision, as Eakins again holds in equilibrium our awareness of time and timelessness. . . .

After this, Eakins's view darkened and turned inward. From here on he painted interior scenes, often shadowy and dimly lit. Increasingly, he painted the single figure, frequently one of his friends, family, or a sympathetic spirit such as another artist, teacher, or student. He was also at his best in painting musicians, doctors, and priests, who similarly possessed creative or spiritual will. Mirrored in their faces were his own anxieties, and together they reveal his ultimate achievement of self-understanding. In 1902 he completed a standard self-portrait (National Academy of Design). It conveys the accumulated weight of age, which the artist nonetheless bears with full self-acceptance. Through all of his late paintings we are made conscious of the artist's sense of humanity, his own and that of others. *The Swimming Hole* was one of his most evocative summaries of personal autobiography. As it had been for Peale and Quidor, in different period styles and attitudes, genre painting became for Eakins the unlikely, yet notably effective vehicle for expressing and describing himself.

# Catalogue entries 336a,b and 337

THEODOR SIEGL, 1976

THOMAS EAKINS (1844-1916)

336a. *Perspective Drawing for The Pair-Oared Shell* (I)

1872

Pencil, ink, and wash on paper

31  $\frac{1}{16}$  × 47  $\frac{1}{8}$  inches (78.8 × 119.6 cm)

Philadelphia Museum of Art. Purchased:

Thomas Skelton Harrison Fund. 44-45-2

PROVENANCE: Mrs. Thomas Eakins,  
until 1930; Charles Bregler

336b. *Perspective Drawing for The Pair-Oared Shell* (II)

1872

Inscription: Thomas Eakins/Perspective of picture painted before 1876  
(handwritten by Mrs. Eakins in black ink, lower right)

Pencil, ink, and watercolor on paper

31  $\frac{13}{16}$  × 47  $\frac{9}{16}$  inches (80.8 × 120.8 cm)

Philadelphia Museum of Art. Purchased:

Thomas Skelton Harrison Fund. 44-45-1

PROVENANCE: Mrs. Thomas Eakins,  
until 1930; Charles Bregler

LITERATURE: Goodrich, *Eakins*, p. 164, nos. 50, 51; John Canaday, "Familiar Truths in Clear and Beautiful Language," *Horizon*, vol. 6, no. 4 (Autumn 1964), p. 93; Sylvan Schendler, *Eakins* (Boston and Toronto, 1967), p. 35; Charles William Dibner, "The Pair-Oared Shell by Thomas Eakins," unpublished paper, University of Pennsylvania, 1967; Hendricks, *Eakins Life and Works*, p. 71, pls. 237, 238.

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Theodor Siegl, "Catalogue entries 336a,b and 337," in ***Philadelphia: Three Centuries of American Art, Bicentennial Exhibition*** (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1976), 391-94. © Philadelphia Museum of Art. Reprinted by permission.

The quality of Eakins's work, exceptional and distinctive from that of his contemporaries, is due in part to his intense involvement with his subject and his ability to convey this involvement to the viewer. In his early work Eakins went to great lengths to study a subject structurally and anatomically before he attempted to represent it on canvas. His knowledge of anatomy was at least as great as that of the average physician and considerably greater than that of the average artist (Goodrich, *Eakins*, p. 10). His perspective studies were yet another way to discover the reasons for a specific appearance and then to construct this appearance with scientific accuracy. Although artists have used the laws of perspective for centuries to represent the intricate foreshortening of complex architecture or to design illusionary stage sets, Eakins, more than most artists, applied these same laws to everyday subject matter, rowboats on the river for instance, and he did so with an astonishing intensity.

The first perspective drawing for *The Pair-Oared Shell* gives a wealth of information so specific that we can locate the spot on the river and tell the exact time when the Biglin brothers' boat glided downstream on the Schuylkill, approaching the old Columbia Bridge: Eakins's measurements are there and the topography is known.

A vertical center line and a horizon line divide the sheet into four identical sections (a method Eakins employed for many years in beginning a canvas). He then constructed a checkerboard floorplan in perspective, each square representing a square foot of reality. The first line is 16 feet from the viewer, the next 17 feet, and so on, up to 64, as noted on the drawing. The distances to the left and the right of the center line are also marked in feet. From these points, lines are drawn converging at the point of sight, which is slightly above the horizon. At far left the last one-foot section is divided into 12 equal segments (inches), and a line is drawn from each point to converge at the horizon. This is the inch-scale of the ground plan, establishing the foreshortening of any number of inches at any given distance in the drawing. Eakins placed this scale conveniently outside the area which he intended to use for the final painting. The next two converging scales are the inch measurements for the boat, its long side at the left, the cross measurements next to it, farther right. Having thus established all the necessary scales, Eakins proceeded to draw the boat in perspective. The stern is 30  $\frac{1}{2}$  feet from the spectator and 5  $\frac{1}{2}$  feet to the right of center. The bow is 63 feet away and 4  $\frac{1}{2}$  feet to the left of center. By projecting these points on an undistorted ground plan we find that the boat is 36 feet long, moving at an angle of 67 degrees away from the viewer.



For his perspective ground plan Eakins used blue ink. The boat and masonry, being real objects, were drawn in pencil or black ink. Red lines on the drawing marked projected points or simple cubes to aid the artist in constructing more complicated details. The oarlocks, for instance, were set within red rectangles which established their general shape before they were drawn in detail.

The three-sided masonry structure which dominates the right background of the drawing represents one pier of the old Columbia Bridge. These piers were demolished in 1917 but we know their shape, dimensions, and location in the river from contemporary records (John C. Trautwine, "Description of the Viaduct near Peter's Island," *Journal of the Franklin Institute*, August 1834, vol. 14, no. 2, n.s., pp. 73-83). Each pier was constructed of hammer-dressed stone blocks, 20 feet wide and 60 feet long, exclusive of a triangular pier head. The pier head was on the upstream side only. The walls of the masonry receded at a rate of  $\frac{3}{4}$  of an inch per foot. What is seen in the perspective drawing is an almost frontal view of the triangular pier head. The last segment to the left is the 60 foot sidewall of the pier, which stands parallel to the flow of the water. Eakins also drew a pencil line from the tip of the pier head, progressing to the left, crossing the bow of the boat at a point which is 53 feet from the viewer and 7 feet to the left of center. The line represents the direction of the sunlight which caused the pier to cast its shadow on the bow of the boat, and in the drawing and the final painting the part of the boat beyond this line is cast in shadow.

With this information, and aided by notations on the drawing, one can draw the boat and pier in their proper dimensions on a ground plan. With the aid of a contemporary map, one can then establish the points of the compass, as has been done in the accompanying illustration. The shadow line on the map establishes that the sun stood northwest by west; the time was therefore 7:20 p.m. If the picture represents the time shortly before sunset, as the mood suggests, the day would have been in early June or mid-July. A 7:20 p.m. sunset occurs on the Schuylkill on May 28 and on July 27.

A strange flattening of the image in Eakins's perspective drawing is also apparent in the final painting. The space is compressed; the boat and the pier look flatter and closer together than one would expect, much as in a photograph taken with a telephoto lens. The reason is that Eakins placed his point of distance (the vanishing point for the diagonals) unusually far away. Traditionally, the implied space of the vanishing point is at a distance from the center of the painting about equal to the width of the canvas. In *The Pair-*

*Oared Shell*, however, the implied distance of the vanishing point is about twice as great, with the result that the painting appears condensed, as if it were the center of a much larger composition.

The second drawing for *The Pair-Oared Shell* was made specifically to construct reflections on the water. The perspective ground plan of the first drawing was repeated, but without the inch scales. The pier and boat were then traced in their proper places from the first drawing. The two rowers, John and Barney Biglin, were then introduced. These main objects were then brushed with watercolors.

To construct the reflections of the rowers, Eakins assumed that each ripple was composed of three planes—one parallel to the surface, one slanted toward the viewer, one away from the viewer. Since the reflection on the hidden plane cannot be seen, there is no need to calculate it. For the two visible reflections Eakins constructed two converging scales in the sky area and numbered them according to distance. The lower scale is numbered from 16 to 30, the higher scale from 20 to 80. Specific dimensions are noted in pencil. Ink and pencil lines specify the direction of the waves in the foreground. The reflections are drawn in geometric shapes and colored with wash to indicate the corresponding object. Blue fields correspond to the kerchiefs; gray fields represent the reflections of shirts and trousers; gray rectangles, the pier; and in the foreground, light brown reflections may represent the invisible bridge. The reflections of outriggers, oarlocks, or center cloud, although their locations are noted, do not appear on the drawing.

337. *The Pair-Oared Shell*

1872-76

Signature: EAKINS/1872 (on bridge pier)

Inscription: "Double Oared Scull"/Thos. Eakins (handwritten by Mrs. Eakins on stretcher); [. . .]sional Oars-men/[. . .]ney & John Biglin/in Pair Oared Shell on the/Schuylkill River under the/old Columbia Bridge/Painted bet. 1872 & 76/by/Thomas Eakins (handwritten by Mrs. Eakins on stretcher)

Oil on canvas

24 × 36 inches (60.9 × 91.4 cm)

Philadelphia Museum of Art. Thomas Eakins Collection. 29-184-35

PROVENANCE: The artist; Mrs. Thomas Eakins

LITERATURE: *The New York Times*, April 20, 1897; *The Philadelphia Evening Telegraph*, April 6, 1881; MMA, *Catalogue of a Loan Exhibition of the Works of Thomas Eakins* (1917) (illus.); PAFA, *Catalogue of a Memorial Exhibition of*

*the Works of the Late Thomas Eakins* (1917), no. 83 (illus.); John Rothenstein, "A Note on Thomas Eakins," *Artwork: A Quarterly*, vol. 6, no. 23 (autumn 1930), p. 197; Forbes Watson "The Growth of a Reputation," *The Arts*, vol. 16, no. 8 (April 1930), p. 564; Goodrich, *Eakins*, no. 49, pl. 7; Bryson Burroughs, "An Estimate of Thomas Eakins," *Magazine of Art*, vol. 30 (July 1937), p. 403; Roland Joseph McKinney, *Thomas Eakins* (New York, 1942), p. 64; Margaret McHenry, *Thomas Eakins Who Painted* (Oreland, Pa., 1946), p. 26; Leslie Katz, "Thomas Eakins Now," *Arts*, vol. 30 (September 1956), pp. 18–19; John W. McCoubrey, *American Tradition in Painting* (New York, 1963), p. 118, pl. 60; Charles Dibner, "The Pair-Oared Shell by Thomas Eakins," unpublished paper, University of Pennsylvania, 1967; Sylvan Schendler, *Eakins* (Boston and Toronto, 1967), pp. 35, 284; Hendricks, *Eakins Life and Works*, pp. 71, 74–75, pl. 236.

*The Pair-Oared Shell* shows two friends of the artist, John and Bernard (Barney) Biglin, practicing in their shell on the Schuylkill River. The Biglin brothers were professional rowers, who earned their living by competing in races throughout the country. Hendricks reports that they were world-famous, and continues: "The sports publications of the time are full of news about the Biglins . . . the particular visit that gave rise to *A Pair-Oared Shell* was celebrated as the first pair-oared race in America. . . . In the race, which the Biglins won, they wore approximately what Eakins showed them wearing in his picture" (Hendricks, *Eakins Life*, p. 74). John Biglin is shown in the stroke position, closer to the viewer, his face drawn with meticulous care. He was the older of the two brothers, twenty-eight at the time, and the same age as Eakins. Barney Biglin, younger by three years, occupies the less important bow seat. Subtle differences in the position and in the rendering of the two champions show us clearly who leads and who is subordinate. But the most precise treatment is reserved for the shell. All its elements are in sharp focus, almost as if the artist intended to explain their function.

The precision and intensity of *The Pair-Oared Shell* were intentional and worked out in great detail. Eakins's preliminary perspective drawings (no. 336) tell us that the Biglin Brothers' boat is heading downstream on the Schuylkill River. Above them, about twelve feet ahead, looms the old Columbia Bridge, its pier just beginning to cast a shadow over the bow of the boat. The time is late afternoon, just before sunset, and the season is late spring or early summer. The background of the painting is equally specific. There, in the evening mist, is an accurate rendition of the west bank of the

river just below the bridge where the Schuylkill takes a sharp turn. To the left of the bridge pier, behind Barney Biglin's head, one can see Belmont Landing, a narrow strip of land where steamboats docked. The canal which separates the landing from the west bank is shown as a light band. Behind it are trees and two houses which are also specific structures.

The disconcerting aspect of this painting is its lack of depth. The boat, the pier, and the west bank of the river appear much closer to each other than they actually are. This led Hendricks to believe that the pier was not an existing one, and that Eakins's bridge could never cross the water (*Eakins Life*, p. 339). Yet the strange flattening of the view is the result of an unusual feature in Eakins's perspective construction. By deliberately selecting a diagonal vanishing point exactly twice as far away as is customary, Eakins managed to depict the scene as it would appear when observed from a distance through a telescope. The artist's interest in optics is known, and his knowledge of perspective was such that the distortion cannot be accidental.

The label affixed to the stretcher by Mrs. Eakins states that the picture was painted between 1872 and 1876. It is indeed possible that Eakins worked on the canvas for several years. He had the habit of dating his paintings the year in which they were begun, rather than when he completed them. There can be no doubt that *The Pair-Oared Shell* was painted entirely in the studio, after each detail had been thoroughly studied beforehand. The paint film of *The Pair-Oared Shell* is generally thin. The artist scraped and glazed, aiming for a high finish, yet bare white ground can be seen between areas of paint in the figures of the rowers. The foreground water is painted with small horizontal strokes, allowing a darker underpainting to show through in places. The highlights of the rowers and the shell receive the most detailed treatment; they are tactile, raised, and applied in bright yellow with a pointed brush. The sky is denser and more textured than the rest of the painting, suggesting that Eakins may have reworked an earlier, smoother version. In the end the artist glazed the surface with brown to accentuate the paint texture.

Eakins did not exhibit *The Pair-Oared Shell* until 1879, perhaps because he kept reworking it until he was finally satisfied. According to William J. Clark, Jr., it "gave . . . a shock to the artistic conventionalities of Philadelphia when it was first shown" (*The Philadelphia Evening Telegraph*, April 6, 1881). Yet other critics found it poetic, expressing "the peculiar charm that everyone has experienced when rowing out of the sunlight into the shadow of a great bridge" (*New York Times*, April 20, 1897). More recently, McCoubrey finds that Eakins "seized an unpromising moment: when the

complex outline of the two rowers and their fragile shell was visually entangled with the simple, overwhelming mass of a stone pier supporting an unseen bridge. In this strange meeting, the human figures are overwhelmed” (John W. McCoubrey, *American Tradition in Painting*, New York, 1963, p. 118). Schendler, on the other hand, sees in the painting an “assertion of human strength and dignity transcending mortality and the erosions of time” (Sylvan Schendler, *Eakins*, Boston, 1967, p. 37). In spite of the specific detail, there is mystery in *The Pair-Oared Shell* which continues to stimulate the imagination and the search for symbolic meaning in the painting.

# The Boxing Paintings of Thomas Eakins

CARL S. SMITH, 1979

Late in the 1890s, accompanied by several of his friends, Thomas Eakins attended a number of prizefights at the Arena on the corner of Broad and Cherry Streets<sup>1</sup> in Philadelphia, diagonally across from the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts and a few blocks from his Chestnut Street studio. Eakins was sufficiently intrigued by the matches he saw to befriend several of the participants and to ask them to pose for him. The results were three major canvases—*Taking the Count* (1898—Yale University Art Gallery, Whitney Collections of Sporting Art, New Haven, Conn.), *Salutat* (1898—Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, Andover, Mass.), and *Between Rounds* (1899—Philadelphia Museum of Art)—and about ten related sketches, studies, and portraits.<sup>2</sup> Although since ancient times painters and sculptors have celebrated their periods' equivalent of the pugilist, Eakins's boxing paintings are completely original in their conception. Indeed, one can think of few works by a serious artist of Eakins's era as far removed from the lofty propriety that dominated nineteenth-century American art as are these treatments of nearly nude boxers. The boxing paintings reflect Eakins's special fondness for sport and vigorous activity in his life and art, as well as his sometimes controversial belief in portraying the unidealized human figure; but they go beyond these interests insofar as they are complicated compositions by a mature master who is using his craft to examine his life and career.

Judging from the paintings, it appears that Eakins's basic intention was to record in careful detail the world of the professional prizefight arena by depicting three phases of a typical fight, though not from the same exact bout. *Taking the Count* captures the moment after a knockdown, *Between Rounds* an interlude in the fight, and *Salutat* a victor's triumph after the bout is over. Most of the principals in these paintings have been identified by Eakins's biographers as accurate portraits, and Eakins's incidental details—such as the theatrical posters and the fight bill in *Taking the Count* and *Between Rounds*—appear to be authentic.

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Carl S. Smith, "The Boxing Paintings of Thomas Eakins," *Prospects: An Annual of American Cultural Studies* 4 (1979): 402-18. Reprinted by permission of Cambridge University Press and the author.

In *Taking the Count*, the earliest and by far the largest of the three canvases, a fighter named Joe Mack, who has just been knocked down by Charlie McKeever, steadies himself as referee H. Walter Schlichter counts off the seconds.<sup>3</sup> Virtually all eyes in the crowd are on Mack as he, stunned, gazes into nowhere. One of his handlers, with a sponge in his hand and a towel around his neck, either shouts directions or informs Mack of the count, while another handler watches with anxious concern, tensely but helplessly gripping the ring rope.<sup>4</sup> The large audience is dotted with the faces of Eakins's acquaintances, including the artist's father (second from the left in the bottom row).<sup>5</sup> The two posters hanging from the balcony facade in the upper right advertise Louis Mann and Clara Lipman in *The Telephone Girl*, a musical comedy then playing at the Walnut Street Theatre, and *The Ballet Girl*, another light theatrical fare, featured at the Chestnut Street Theatre.<sup>6</sup> In this painting, as well as in the other two, Eakins puts his detail to subtle creative use. For example, McKeever's sash is bright green and his socks are pulled up along his calves, while Mack's belt is a faded blue and his socks are rumpled, all of these elements reflecting the relative condition of the two men in the fight.

In *Salutat*, the victorious Billy Smith waves up to the cheering crowd, which again includes Eakins's friends, as Smith and his handlers head toward the dressing room.<sup>7</sup> While in this painting and in *Taking the Count* the vantage point is very close to and just about on a level with the principal figures, in the third canvas, *Between Rounds*, it is outside the ring, several yards away from and slightly below the boxer, who is again Billy Smith. Here Smith sits on his stool as his manager, Billy McCarney, fans him and his handler, Ellwood McCloskey, looks him over, a water bottle firmly gripped in his left hand.<sup>8</sup> The individual closest to us is none of these three men, but the timekeeper, seated in the left foreground. This official is Clarence Cranmer, a newspaperman and friend of Eakins, who sometimes did in fact serve as the timer at prizefights.<sup>9</sup> Cranmer grasps his watch in his left hand as his right hand rests by the bell that he will soon strike to begin round two, as indicated by the sign on the pressbox. The fight poster hanging from the balcony tier in the left border of the painting is the actual card for April 22, 1898, listing other bouts including separate fights involving both Smith and McCloskey.<sup>10</sup>

As far as we know, Eakins did not go to professional prizefights until shortly before he executed the paintings. By various accounts, Cranmer, Schlichter, and Eakins's close friend and fellow-artist, Samuel Murray (who sculpted both Smith and McCloskey<sup>11</sup>), took him to the bouts and helped arrange for the posing.<sup>12</sup> It is not surprising, however, that Eakins—who swam in the Schuylkill by the first of May, went to bullfights in Seville, rowed with the champion oarsman Max Schmitt, hunted plover in the Jersey marshes with his father, brought two horses and a new-found skill with a lariat back from a vacation in the Dakota Bad Lands, and bicycled with Murray to visit their clerical friends at the St. Charles Seminary in Overbrook—was captivated by the hardy masculine world of the Arena. Eakins's biographer Lloyd Goodrich tells us that the artist would attend fights “several times a week, . . . watching them with such intensity that he would go through all the motions,” and that at “polite parties [Eakins] would draw friends aside to discuss the latest bouts.”<sup>13</sup>

In deciding to paint the boxers, Eakins was breaking new artistic ground. At the time the paintings were done, professional boxing was an increasingly popular but still not a respectable activity, and it was hardly a conventional topic for a painter of Eakins's stature. While “the manly art of self-defense” as practiced under the Marquis of Queensbury rules (which called for boxing gloves, three-minute rounds, and most of the regulations in common use today) was taught more and more in the posh new athletic clubs as well as in the YMCA gymnasiums that were being built in the nation's cities, actual prizefighting for a purse moved very haltingly to a general legal acceptance that came only after World War I. Despite the broad following of the vivid and brawling John L. Sullivan, the last bare-knuckles champion, and the scientific method and refinement (at least in comparison to Sullivan) of Gentleman Jim Corbett, who defeated John L. Sullivan in 1892, it was not until the twentieth century that promoters of championship fights could be assured that they would not have to move their bouts at the last minute to avoid the local police. Though many respectable people—including Eakins, his friends, and the evidently solid citizens pictured in his paintings—attended the bouts, prizefighting's critics, then as now, attacked the sport's inherent savagery and the criminal company it habitually seemed to keep.<sup>14</sup>

Boxing, if not prizefighting, figured in Eakins's work a good deal before the 1890s, however, and the painter's earlier acquaintance with the sport partly explains why he used it as a subject later in his life. In fact, one of his first experiences at the École des Beaux Arts, where the young artist



studied in the late 1860s, involved boxing. Eakins wrote to his father in October of 1866:

There was a dispute in the studio between two of the fellows as to which was the strongest. It was decided they should wrestle as soon as the model rested. So they stripped themselves and fought nearly an hour, and when they were done, they were as dirty as sweeps and bloody. Since then there has been wrestling most every day, and we have had three pairs all stripped at once, and we see some anatomy. The Americans have the reputation of being a nation of boxers. Max Schmitt taught me a little about boxing, which I have forgotten. A French student squared off at me, offering to box; I jumped in nothing loth for a little tussle, but another student jerked my opponent away, saying, "My good man, let me give you a piece of counsel: never box with an American."<sup>15</sup>

This amusing anecdote reveals not only that by his early twenties Eakins had boxed but also that he believed athletes excellent studies for a painter interested in drawing human anatomy. He later brought athletes of all sorts—even trapeze artists—into both his studio and his anatomy classes at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts.<sup>16</sup> Several photographs that Eakins took of his students in the early 1880s involve some good-natured sparring and wrestling in the countryside outside the city. The students are nude except, in some cases, for boxing gloves.<sup>17</sup> Eakins probably encouraged these bouts, recalling their usefulness in his own student days as a way to "see some anatomy," as well as because of their appeal as part of the male world of boisterous camaraderie and vigorous exercise that he knew in Paris and enjoyed all his life. When Eakins finally saw the Philadelphia bouts in the late 1890s, they no doubt reminded him of his earlier familiarity with boxing, and it probably occurred to him that here was an extraordinary opportunity to paint the unadorned human figure. The central feature of all three paintings is that they are striking portraits of virtually naked men.<sup>18</sup>

The spare severity of Eakins's handling of his stripped-down boxers and their world reflects an approach to figure drawing that he formed early in his career. In a letter to his family in which he described his reaction to the paintings he viewed at the Paris Exposition of 1867, Eakins

expressed his dislike for the idealized nudes that so pervaded nineteenth-century academic painting. He criticized the “pictures of naked women, standing, sitting, lying down, flying, dancing, doing nothing, which they call Phrynes, Venuses, nymphs, hermaphrodites, houris, and Greek proper names,” and he condemned what he considered the unnatural prudishness of the taste of the Second Empire, adding:

I can conceive of few circumstances wherein I would have to paint a woman naked, but if I did I would not mutilate her for double the money. She is the most beautiful thing there is—except a naked man, but I never saw a study of one [a naked man, presumably] exhibited. It would be a godsend to see a fine man painted in a studio with bare walls, alongside of the smiling, smirking goddesses of many complexions, amidst the delicious arsenic green trees and gentle wax flowers and purling streams a-running up and down the hills—especially up. I hate affectation.<sup>19</sup>

This statement contains a number of important points. It reveals Eakins's belief that the human form is among the most beautiful of subjects, as well as his preference for the male over the female nude. It is also a credo of Eakins's realism and his contempt for what he considered the artificial qualities of most figure painters and their work.<sup>20</sup> This credo underlies his fondness for such “candid” and documentary male nudes as *The Swimming Hole* [*Swimming*] (1883–85—[now Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth]), the boxers, and the group of paintings executed both early and late in his career depicting Philadelphia sculptor William Rush and *his* controversial female model.<sup>21</sup> His art is generally free of studied postures and attitudes, and of subjects that were not a part of Philadelphia life. Boxers were excellent physical specimens, as good as any figure painter could require. Their activity was undeniably a real part of modern urban life, so there was nothing artificial about depicting them. In posing his fighters in his own studio or even against the dusty background of the boxing arena, Eakins discovered a way to paint without affectation “a fine man . . . in a studio with bare walls,” the “godsend” he had mused about over three decades earlier in Paris.

If Eakins's boxing pictures merely involved the intersection of his interests in the sporting life and in painting the male nude, however, they would be closer in spirit than they are to his depictions of wrestlers that are contemporaneous with *Taking the Count*, *Salutat*, and *Between Rounds*.<sup>22</sup> Eakins's wrestlers are even more briefly attired than his boxers and, as one wrestler holds the other against the mat, we view more of the play of anatomy, and from closer range, than we do in the prizefight paintings. But these canvases, which are based directly on an Eakins photograph,<sup>23</sup> have virtually none of the elaborate and carefully orchestrated drama of the three boxing works. We hardly see the features of the men involved, since their heads are turned away from us. In addition, their exercise appears to be a workout between two members of an athletic club rather than a professional contest: there is no referee or timer, no multitiered arena, and little of the sense of serious formality and ceremony that characterizes the boxing pictures. In planning the boxing paintings, Eakins perceived some special meanings in the world of the boxers that he carefully conveyed on canvas.

One of the first things we note when we consider the three prizefight pictures is that the painter's aim was not to exploit the savage energy we usually associate with boxing. Boxing requires more stamina than almost any other organized athletic event, and it is virtually the only modern sport in which the participant's express aim is, within the limits of certain rules, not only to punish his opponent physically, but, if possible, to knock him unconscious. Even for those who love the ring because of their appreciation of the fine points of what has been called "the sweet science," boxing's appeal lies at least partly in its unmediated violence. In Eakins's paintings, however, no fighter touches any other, nor does any handler touch a fighter. In two of the three paintings there is no visible opponent and the fight is not in progress: the conflict is over in *Salutat*, while in *Between Rounds* Billy Smith sits and waits, storing his energy for the round ahead. In addition, moving from the sketch of the composition to the final painting of *Between Rounds*, Eakins slowed McCarney's fanning of Smith from a frenetic to a more relaxed motion, further deemphasizing violent action. The punch that has downed Joe Mack in *Taking the Count* has already been thrown. Furthermore, Mack has fallen but he is evidently not hurt badly, since he seems to be regaining himself and his face is neither battered nor bloody. McKeever is ready to inflict more punishment, but his stance and expression are not particularly aggressive. The referee appears to be asleep on his feet; his eyes are closed and his pose, in which he almost seems to be lending a helping hand rather than counting Mack out,

suggests anything but sudden and violent activity. Eakins also minimizes the suggestion of brutality through his choice of models. Although well conditioned, none of his fighters is an imposing figure in the paintings, nor were they in real life. Featherweight Billy Smith fought at under 120 pounds, and Eakins in fact reduced some of this fighter's proportions in the transition from the study of Smith that is in the Philadelphia Museum of Art to the final work. Mack and McKeever were welterweights, perhaps twenty pounds heavier than Smith, but still not large men.

To see how "peaceful" Eakins's paintings are, one need only glance at some of the work of the following generations of American realists, almost all of whom were directly influenced by Eakins but who were more interested in depicting frenzied activity. In particular, a number of George Bellows' oils and lithographs come to mind, such as *Both Members of this Club* (1909—National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.), in which two faceless and bloody hulks pound the life out of one another, or *Dempsey and Firpo* (1924—Whitney Museum of American Art, New York City), which portrays the moment in round one of this famous 1923 championship contest when defending titleholder Dempsey went flying through the ropes, only to climb back in and defeat the challenger in the next round. In Bellows' lithograph *Between Rounds* (1916), the two exhausted fighters slump on their stools and over the ropes as they gasp for life, without a trace of Billy Smith's determined repose; and in *A Knockout* (lithograph, 1921)—Bellows' equivalent of *Taking the Count*—the upright fighter does not stand back as McKeever does, but, tasting blood, bulls his way past the referee to finish the slaughter. Bellows also tends to moralize, which Eakins avoids as much as he does violence. The fight fans in *Both Members of this Club* and *Stag at Sharkey's* (1909—Cleveland Museum of Art) are ghoulish and predatory, pushing toward the ring in their bloodlust. Eakins has no such interest in condemning the sport and the baser sides of human nature it can bring out.<sup>24</sup>

A more useful comparison in this regard is the work of Jean Leon Gérôme, Eakins's teacher during the late 1860s at the École des Beaux Arts and a man whom the Philadelphia painter admired during his whole career. The most relevant painting in question is Gérôme's depiction of the Roman gladiatorial arena at the time of the gluttonous Emperor Vitellius (A.D. 15-69), titled *Hail Caesar! We Who Are About to Die Salute You* (1859—Yale University Art Gallery), which Eakins saw at the 1867 Paris Exposition. This canvas has some of the same elements as the boxing paintings: the professional warriors, the crowded stadium, the interaction of combatants

and audience, and a neoclassical emphasis on stasis. Eakins's Latin title *Salutat* and Billy Smith's wave to the stands are unmistakable allusions to the Roman arena and the earlier example of Gérôme.<sup>25</sup> Writing to his family April 1, 1869, Eakins praised Gérôme's painting, especially his teacher's ability to capture "those cold cruel barbarians killing one another for love of fighting" and "the fat hideous Cesar [*sic*]"<sup>26</sup> who presides over the carnage. But Eakins's modern gladiators—in contrast to Gérôme's Romans—are not faceless hired murderers armed with helmets, shields, and forbidding weapons, nor do they appear to be "killing one another for love of fighting." He offers no equivalent to the bloody sand of Gérôme's arena or the carcasses of dead gladiators who are being dragged away, and his sedate and sober Philadelphians are as different from the decadent patrons of the Roman games as they are from Bellows' habitués of Sharkey's club.

Another passage in the letter from Paris gives us a key to Eakins's boxing paintings. He applauds his "dear master" Gérôme for his exceptional ability to portray "the living thinking acting men, whose faces tell their life long story."<sup>27</sup> Eakins evidently believed that his boxers were such men, and he was eager to take his pencil and palette into the Arena and the athletic club because he saw something attractively earthy and honest in their unrefined world. In another letter home he explained that he preferred the New York that was "composed largely of rowdies prize fighters jail birds swindlers pick pockets" to the Boston "of scientific ladies and gentlemen who know professors intimately," because "the New Yorkers are the most intelligent & least pretentious."<sup>28</sup> These various remarks suggest that the boxing paintings seem to have been motivated by an uncondescending respect for these unpretentious athletes who carefully disciplined their minds and bodies and who earned their living by actively testing their wits and strength.

Eakins made life-long friends of his boxers, using his art to become part of their world as they, through their profession, had become part of his. According to Goodrich, they would drop by his studio for their practice sessions, "so that for a time the place became a sort of gymnasium." He even executed portraits of Schlichter's wife Maybelle and Charlie McKeever's mother, finishing these gifts with personal inscriptions. Billy Smith, who called Eakins "a Gentleman and an Artist, a Realist of Realists," remained close to Eakins long after he posed for *Salutat* and *Between Rounds*, and would come around to massage the ailing artist in Eakins's later years.<sup>29</sup> The three boxing canvases should be considered,

then, not only genre paintings but also portraits that help document Eakins's sense of the range of his community of fellowship, which was as wide as any artist of his era with the possible exception of his friend Walt Whitman. One wonders if Eakins distinguished in his own mind between these boxers and the concert singers and other musicians of whom he was so fond, or his Doctors Gross and Agnew in their respective operating theaters (each complete with rows of spectators and a bloody central drama that recall the prize ring), or any of his other portraits of "living thinking acting men" (and women) "whose faces tell their life long story."

This is not to say that these paintings do not have a particular significance because they are specifically boxing paintings. Eakins carefully employs the elements of the prize ring to speculate on a number of issues that at first seem to be far removed from the arena. For one thing, he seems to be very much concerned with time in all three works, as Sylvan Schendler has suggested.<sup>30</sup> In *Between Rounds* the timer, not the policeman on the left is the figure of authority and order, directing and shaping the action. He allows Smith sixty seconds to rest his body and clear his mind, and he grants the same minute to the reporters in the press box to go over their notes, to McCarney to fan his fighter, and to the men in the crowd to relax. Joe Mack, in *Taking the Count*, has ten seconds of grace, and both he and those around him are aware of the special significance of his actions in those seconds. One man seated beneath *The Telephone Girl* poster is not looking at Mack but is checking his watch, perhaps timing the knockdown himself. Until Mack either rises to resume fighting or the ten seconds elapse, movement halts all around him. In this brief period he becomes an isolated figure, struggling on his own. In *Salutat* Billy Smith, now outside the special time conditions of the ring, will soon disappear from the center of attention and emerge dressed for the life of Broad Street. When Smith next sees the spectators, he will be in their world as one of them.

One is aware not only of time but, more specifically, of mortality as Eakins explores the metaphorical applications of the ring. Here some comparison with his other sporting pictures is useful. Throughout the 1870s and early 1880s, Eakins was an active sportsman, and he turned his interests in rowing, hunting, sailing, swimming, and similar pursuits into a major source for his work. Then he all but abandoned this source. By the time he began to sketch his fighters he was over fifty, and his canvases reflect the eye and hand of a man older and less fit than the painter of the oarsmen, hunters, and swimmers. These earlier figures are out-of-doors, in front of distant horizon lines, and under fair skies. If the settings in which

they move are not exactly Edenic, the presence of nearby urban Philadelphia is certainly not threatening, if it is felt at all. In almost every case, the people in these paintings—sometimes including Eakins himself, who swims toward the men on the rocks in *The Swimming Hole*—glide or float freely and naturally along the surface of water, be it a river, a marsh, or the out-of-the-way swimming hole. Whether relaxed or intent, young or old, they strike us as eternally fit men, free of any consciousness of limits.

The boxing arena is, by contrast, a dark and even shabby indoor world where the obviously urban spectators and the city they represent surround the boxers. Even if Charlie McKeever seems isolated from the crowd and from the costumed figure in the bill for *The Telephone Girl*, whose awkward pose mocks the boxer's classic stance, the fact that McKeever is so encircled is not readily ignored. He works in a context of restrictions and harsh opposition. He is limited not only to precise time periods, but also to a carefully measured space in which to act, and he must confront the fists and body of an opponent. His sport involves physical punishment—even danger and possibly death. It is, after all, a fight, Eakins's de-emphasis of violence notwithstanding.

In summary, Eakins's boxers speak eloquently of the vulnerability of the individual in a difficult world. While in his earlier sporting and outdoor pictures Eakins's eye was primarily on vigor, strength, and vitality, here it is more on the struggles that test the human character. This is not to say that he believed the individual to be unequal to such struggles, for his boxers display confidence and dignity. If Eakins depicts Mack down on one knee and dazed, he still allows the slender Billy Smith his moment of triumph, and he obviously admires Smith's self-possession as he sits on his stool waiting for the next round to begin.

Eakins undoubtedly felt a kinship with his boxers that gives these paintings an additional personal meaning. By avoiding the violence usually associated with the ring and by posing his dignified fighters as lonely and even reflective figures, he recasts them as introspective artists like himself. These three boxing paintings are self-portraits of a sort because they embody Eakins's own complex combination of physical, intellectual, and artistic vigor and independence. They also come at the end of probably the worst decade of his career in terms of public recognition, a neglect he deeply felt. (In 1900, Gordon Hendricks tells us, Eakins angrily rejected an offer for *Between Rounds* that was lower than the \$1,600 price at which he had offered it, and, when he died sixteen years later, he still owned both this canvas and *Salutat*—each valued at \$50 in his will.)<sup>31</sup> Perhaps the men

he saw at the Arena reminded him of his own trials as a painter and teacher—he, too, worked alone for so long supported by little but his considerable strength, determination, and skill. And perhaps these figures externalized the tensions and doubts he must have felt as he worked, as well as the hopes for his own eventual triumph.

Through his realistic use of detail, however, Eakins carefully avoids oversimplification and bombast. His paintings are certainly not strictly autobiographical, nor are they illustrations of “the survival of the fittest” or any other symbolic meaning the ring might immediately suggest. If Billy Smith’s pale body seems to glow in the overhead light, Eakins misses none of the seediness of the dusty Arena, nor the fact that the referee’s formal clothes do not quite fit him.<sup>32</sup> The casual hand-in-the-pocket of Smith’s second in *Salutat* and the business-like manner of the timer and the reporters in *Between Rounds* make it clear that this is not an epic confrontation, but a carefully regulated spectacle staged for the public by professionals. The theater bills simultaneously impress us with the seriousness of this stripped-down struggle compared with the costumed frivolity a few blocks away, and also remind us that the bout is an entertainment analogous to these musical revues.<sup>33</sup> The ring may be the arena of life, but to Billy Smith it is a job; the referee’s hand may be the judgment of mortality that counts us all out, but his fourth finger is encircled with a wedding band. In short, Eakins’s metaphor is tightly controlled.

But we cannot discount in any way the importance of Eakins’s choice of metaphor and his handling of his subject. Both this selection and treatment reveal how important a figure Eakins was in that movement involving a group of related developments in America at the turn of the century known collectively to cultural historians as the “strenuous life.” The links between these developments are not easy to define precisely, but they include a widespread rise in the interest in organized athletics and physical exercise, as well as such apparently separate phenomena as an imperialist foreign policy, a reform impulse in domestic affairs, and a general reaction against the restraints of an increasingly organized urban-industrial culture.<sup>34</sup> The major figure in all this was, of course, Theodore Roosevelt—cowboy, big game hunter, conservationist, Rough Rider, and president—who spoke in Chicago in 1899 on the moral value both personally and nationally of “the doctrine of the strenuous life, the life of toil and effort, of labor and strife. . . .” Although Roosevelt did not approve of prizefighting, he believed that boxing was a “first-class sport,” and even as chief executive he sparred for exercise. He seems to have been



expressing Eakins's own values when he talked of his contempt for the "overcivilized" (and hence timid and dull) man and praised "the man who does not shrink from danger, from hardship, or from bitter toil, and who out of these wins the splendid ultimate triumph."<sup>35</sup> For the Eakins who carried a Smith and Wesson revolver with him in Paris, who rowed, hunted, swam, and bicycled until weakened by disease and age, who vacationed in Roosevelt's own Dakota after resigning from the Academy in 1886, who worked out calculus problems in his spare time to relax his mind, who was "nothing but for a little tussle," and who was drawn to artists, critics, soldiers, surgeons, musicians, athletes, and all "living thinking acting men," the boxing paintings are one more testimony to his participation in the "strenuous life."

One must avoid oversimplifying the connection between Eakins and Roosevelt, however. Eakins was a half-generation older, and his interest in sport and fitness included none of the president's aggressive posturing and ideology. Eakins's work from the 1860s on, his preference for "rowdies" and "prizefighters" and an uncompromising realism, as well as his dislike for affectation and for "scientific ladies and gentlemen who know professors intimately," can be understood as anticipating certain aspects of the artistic side of the "strenuous life." This side coincided at least in part with the celebrated reaction against the genteel tradition, more specifically with the rise of realism as an accepted aesthetic and with the discovery of new and perhaps more vital forms and themes in American arts and letters.

Eakins's work as a whole places him in the company of his favorite American artist, Winslow Homer, as well as that of such literary figures as Whitman (and later Stephen Crane and Theodore Dreiser) in redefining the standards of high art in America.<sup>36</sup> The aptness and importance of Eakins's choice and handling of his subject in his boxing pictures are verified by the extent to which other important artists of similar sympathies were subsequently drawn to the prize ring. Fighters have been consistently important to militantly antigenteel painters such as Bellows and several members of The Eight, and to iconoclastic American writers from Jack London to Norman Mailer.<sup>37</sup> In his spirited celebration of "John L. Sullivan, the Strong Boy of Boston," Vachel Lindsay—whose career was dedicated to establishing a new and vigorous American poetry—tells how the brutal, boorish, but irresistibly colorful Sullivan "broke every single rib" of challenger Jake Kilrain in their 1889 championship bout, and in the same mythic, bare-fisted act seemed to purge Lindsay's youthful consciousness

of its preoccupation with the proper world of Lord Fauntleroy, Tennyson, and Louisa May Alcott.<sup>38</sup> By depicting professional boxers and their unrespectable setting with sober restraint, Eakins not only showed his admiration for these men and their personal qualities, but also located the very embodiment of strenuousness and the revolt against convention as few, if any, American painters had done before him.<sup>39</sup> Aware as we are of his artistic heirs, we should not forget how original an innovator Eakins was in revealing how expressive boxing could be.

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- 1 In his book *Thomas Eakins: His Life and Work* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1933), p. 189, Lloyd Goodrich states that the Arena is the setting for *Between Rounds*, probably because it is named in the fight poster in that painting. In all likelihood the Arena is also the setting for the other two paintings, since the backgrounds of all three canvases are so similar and the theater posters in *Between Rounds* also appear in *Taking the Count*. According to Joseph Jackson, the Arena, which no longer exists, was first known as the Cyclorama Building, so called after the circular historical paintings that were displayed inside it. During the 1890s it was used as a boxing stadium, but in May 1899 it was reconverted to house a cyclorama of "The Battle of Manila Bay," which celebrated the triumph of Admiral Dewey. For more on the Arena, see Jackson's *Encyclopedia of Philadelphia* (Harrisburg, Pa.: The National Historical Association, 1931), II, 535–36.
  - 2 There are two sketches of the three figures in *Taking the Count* (9 ¾ in. x 9 ¾ in.—Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Conn.); and 18 in. x 16 in.—Joseph H. Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.), one study for the referee (20 in. x 16 in.—Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden), and one study for *Salutat* (20 in. x 16 in.—Collection of Mr. and Mrs. James H. Beal). There are one sketch for *Between Rounds* (5 ¾ in. x 4 in.—Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden), two studies of the seated boxer (20 in. x 16 in.—Philadelphia Museum of Art; and 21 in. x 17 in.—Wichita Art Museum), and a study of the timer (21 in. x 17 in.—Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Harry Rubin).
  - 3 See Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins*, p. 188. Correspondence in the American Arts Collection of the Yale University Art Gallery indicates some uncertainty about the identity of the boxers, but Schlichter is definitely the referee. According to the late boxing expert Nat Fleischer (letter to John Marshall Phillips, October 3, 1950), McKeever was "one of the great fighters of his day." Fleischer also states that Mack (who, like McKeever, was a welterweight) was better known as a trainer and manager than as a fighter, and that Schlichter was a newspaperman who covered boxing. Schlichter also has been credited with having broken the story of the Black Sox scandal in the World Series of 1919. See Phyllis D. Rosenzweig, *The Thomas Eakins Collection of the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1977), p. 162.
  - 4 In *The Life and Work of Thomas Eakins* (New York: Grossman, 1974), p. 318, Gordon Hendricks argues that the handler with his hand on the ropes is Joe Mack, painted a second time.
  - 5 Hendricks, *Life and Work*, p. 317. Goodrich (*Thomas Eakins*, pp. 188–89), asserts that the man on the extreme right in the first row of the lower stands is John N. Fort, music and art critic, who posed for an Eakins portrait in 1898. John Wilmerding, who has worked on the portrait of Fort, informs me that the identification is questionable.

- 6 Advertisements for both shows appeared in the Philadelphia *Public Ledger*, April 23, 1898, indicating that the content and, in all likelihood, the format of the two posters are authentic.
- 7 Smith, a featherweight, was good enough to challenge the noted champion Terrible Terry McGovern in November 1899 but was knocked out in the third round. For records of this and many other fights, I am indebted to Nat Fleischer's *All-Time Ring Record Book* (Norwalk, Conn.: O'Brien Suburban Press, 1943). According to Hendricks (*Life and Work*, p. 241), Smith later became an evangelist on the order of Billy Sunday. In a charming letter written for the Walker Art Galleries when they sold the study of Smith's head and upper torso now in the Wichita Art Museum, the ex-fighter explained that Eakins came to a boxing club and asked him to pose first for *Between Rounds*, then *Salutat* (although the dates on the paintings indicate the reverse order). Concerning Eakins's technique, Smith recollects the artist's devotion to authentic detail: "In his work he would not add or subtract. I recall, while painting the portrate [sic] you just sold, I noticed a dark smear across my upper lip, I asked Mr. Eakins what it was, he said it was my mustache; I wanted it of [sic]; He said it was there and there it stayed." For the entire letter, see "Feather-Weight Billy Smith," *Journal of the Archives of American Art*, 4 (July 1964), 15–16. Hendricks (*Life and Work*, p. 328) identifies the man clapping in the extreme right as Samuel Murray, the figure above Murray's left shoulder as Benjamin Eakins, the spectator above the second carrying the bucket as Clarence Cranmer (see subsequent discussion of Cranmer in the text and in note 9), and the man to his left as Eakins's student David Wilson Jordan, whose portrait Eakins painted in 1899.
- 8 McCarney, according to Fleischer (letter to Carl S. Smith, August 24, 1971, and *Ring Record Book*, p. 304), was a fight manager and club owner. He later handled Luther McCarty, one of the most promising of the "white hopes" who were expected to dethrone the controversial black heavyweight champion Jack Johnson. (McCarty died of freak brain damage in 1913, before he could ever meet Johnson.) McCarney also worked the Dempsey-Willard title fight in Toledo, July 4, 1919, in which Dempsey won the championship. I have found in the *Ring Record Book* a number of fights involving McCloskey, including a no-decision bout with McGovern in 1900. McCloskey was a boiler-maker who accidentally lost an eye in 1889. He fought with one eye until 1902, when he lost the other, and then he ran a saloon and cigar store. He brought out a pamphlet, *The Blind Pugilist, and His Pupil James McCarty: Starting an Exhibition of Boxing* (Philadelphia?: n.d.), in which he reviewed his career and explained the fine points of self-defense. He claims in this pamphlet to have taught Charlie McKeever how to box.
- 9 After Eakins's death, Cranmer served as agent for Mrs. Eakins in the sale of her husband's pictures (Hendricks, *Life and Work*, pp. 238, 284–85). A letter of November 13, 1930, from the E. C. Babcock Galleries to Francis B. Garvan, who gave *Taking the Count* to Yale, refers to the existence of an actual fight program listing Cranmer as timekeeper and Schlichter as referee (Curatorial Files, American Arts Collection, Yale University Art Gallery).
- 10 Smith lost to Tim Callahan in six rounds. I do not know who won McCloskey's fight with Harry Berger. See Fleischer, *Ring Record Book*, p. 115, and Hendricks, *Life and Work*, p. 239. Hendricks (p. 346) says that the Smith-Callahan fight is depicted in *Between Rounds*.
- 11 For photographs of these sculptures, see Hendricks, *Life and Work*, p. 248, and William D. Cox, ed., *Boxing in Art and Literature* (New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1935), facing p. 208.
- 12 Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins*, pp. 92, 103; Hendricks, *Life and Work*, pp. 236, 239; and Roland McKinney, *Thomas Eakins* (New York: Crown, 1942), p. 18.
- 13 Near the end of his life, Goodrich adds (*Thomas Eakins*, pp. 103, 140), Eakins liked to talk with Murray about the prizefights.

- 14 For more on the history of sport, with particular reference to the status of boxing in nineteenth-century America, see John R. Betts, *America's Sporting Heritage: 1850-1950* (Reading, Pa.: Addison Wesley, 1974); Foster R. Dulles, *A History of Recreation: America Learns to Play* (New York: Appleton Century Crofts, 1965), pp. 114-46, 226-28; Duncan Edwards, "Life at the Athletic Club," *Scribner's*, 18 (July 1895), 4-23; Jennie Holliman, *American Sports: 1785-1835* (Philadelphia: Porcupine Press, 1975), pp. 138-47; John A. Krout, *Annals of American Sport* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1929), pp. 28, 206, 227-39; Frederic L. Paxson, "The Rise of Sport," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 4 (September 1917), 143-68; and Alexander Johnston, *Ten—and Out! The Complete History of the Prize Ring in America* (New York: Ives Washburn, 1947).
  - 15 Quoted in Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins*, p. 13.
  - 16 In regard to Eakins's interest in anatomy and his teaching methods, see Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins*, pp. 9-10, 41, 65-84; Hendricks, *Life and Work*, pp. 125-35, 211-17; and Margaret McHenry, *Thomas Eakins Who Painted* (privately printed, 1946), pp. 44, 126. In the 1870s and 1880s, Eakins also used nude athletes in his ground-breaking work in the photographic study of the movement of men and animals. For reproductions of several of these photographs, see Gordon Hendricks, *The Photographs of Thomas Eakins* (New York: Grossman, 1972), Nos. 87-121, 127-32.
  - 17 Hendricks, *Photographs*, Nos. 122-26. See also Garnett McCoy, "Some Recently Discovered Thomas Eakins Photographs," *Archives of American Art Journal*, 12, No. 4 (1972), 17.
  - 18 In both sketches for *Taking the Count* the boxers are nude, indicating that they posed that way.
  - 19 Quoted in Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins*, p. 20.
  - 20 Note, in particular, Eakins's dislike for the work of Rubens, which he saw in Spain in 1869: "Rubens is the nastiest most vulgar noisy painter that ever lived. His men are twisted to pieces. His modeling is always crooked and dropsical and no marking is ever in its right place or anything like what he sees in nature, his people never have bones, his color is dashing and flashy, his people must all be in the most violent action must use the strength of Hercules if a little watch is to be wound up, the wind must be blowing great guns even in a chamber or dining room, everything must be making a noise and tumbling about there must be monsters too for his men were not monstrous enough for him" (quoted in McHenry, *Thomas Eakins Who Painted*, pp. 17-18).
  - 21 In regard to Eakins's special interest in Rush's supposed use of a nude female model in early nineteenth century Philadelphia, see Gordon Hendricks, "Eakins's *William Rush Carving his Allegorical Statue of the Schuylkill*," *The Art Quarterly*, 31 (Winter 1968), 382-404, and Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins*, pp. 57-60. Hendricks and Goodrich agree that Eakins, hurt by the critical treatment of *The Gross Clinic* at the Centennial in 1876 and feeling restricted by conventions concerning the nude, sensed a kinship with Rush.
- The natural poses or situations of most of Eakins's nudes, and of the Rush pictures in particular, underline the whole issue of the slow acceptance of the nude as a subject. When Eakins observed that he could "conceive of few circumstances wherein [he] would have to paint a woman naked," he probably used the words "have to" as much or more in the sense of opportunity than obligation. That is, he was aware that he would have few chances to paint the nude besides the sketches of the figure classes. Recall his resignation as professor of drawing and painting at the Academy in 1886 largely as a result of the dispute over his insistence on using live models of both sexes in both male and female classes. David Sellin discusses the history of the nude in Philadelphia in "Howard Roberts, Thomas Eakins, and a Century of Philadelphia Nudes," in *The First Pose* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1976), pp. 19-72.
- 22 The central painting is *The Wrestlers* (1899—Columbus Gallery of Fine Arts). There are also two studies, one in the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the other in the Los Angeles County Museum.

- 23 Hendricks, *Photographs*, No. 229. See also Nos. 230–31.
- 24 Charles H. Morgan discusses Bellows and the ring in *George Bellows: Painter of America* (New York: Reynal, 1965), pp. 69, 98, 263–64. Jules David Prown compares Eakins's and Bellows' boxers in *American Painting: From Its Beginnings to the Armory Show* (Geneva, Switzerland: Skira, 1969), pp. 130–31.
- 25 Eakins carved on the original frame of this painting and wrote on the back of the Hirshhorn study for it the longer title "*Dextra victrix conclamantes salutat*" ("He salutes the cheering crowd with his victorious right hand"). For more on Eakins and Gérôme, see Gerald Ackerman, "Thomas Eakins and His Parisian Masters Gérôme and Bonnat," *Gazette des Beaux Arts*, 73 (April 1969), 235–56, and Hendricks, *Life and Work*, pp. 41–56.
- 26 Archives of American Art/Smithsonian Institution, Gift of Dr. Marian Davis.
- 27 Ibid.
- 28 Thomas Eakins to Frances Eakins, July 8, 1869, Archives of American Art/Smithsonian Institution, Gift of Dr. Marian Davis.
- 29 According to Goodrich, Eakins also inscribed the studies of Billy Smith and Cranmer to his subjects. The portrait of Mrs. McKeever is lost. See Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins*, pp. 104, 188–89, 208, and Hendricks, *Life and Work*, p. 241.
- 30 Sylvan Schendler, *Eakins* (Boston: Little Brown, 1967), pp. 152–55.
- 31 Hendricks, *Life and Work*, pp. 239, 243–44, 276.
- 32 In the Yale sketch for *Taking the Count*, the referee appears to be wearing a light-colored hat with a black band. Eakins changed his costume in the final painting, perhaps either because referees at the Arena actually did dress formally (whereas Schlichter posed in more casual clothes in Eakins's studio) or because he wanted to emphasize the gravity of the bout.
- 33 "The posters hung up on the gallery, simple documentary elements of the scene, colorful reminders of the late nineties, are parodies of the painting's meaning, light-hearted commentaries upon its serious purpose" (Schendler, *Eakins*, p. 152). In choosing to include these posters, Eakins was perhaps reminded of another Gérôme painting, *The Duel After the Masquerade* (1857–59—Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore, Md.). The setting of this narrative work is early morning in a snowy wooded area, and we are witnessing the aftermath of a fatal duel that presumably was prompted by some affront at a masquerade ball. A man dressed as Pierrot (recalling the clown in the *Ballet Girl* poster) slumps—fatally stabbed—in the arms of his distraught seconds, who are also in costume, as his opponent (who wears the garb of an American Indian) and the opponent's supporters leave the field. Although, as in the case of *Hail Caesar!* and *Salutat*, Gérôme's painting is much more melodramatic than Eakins', the ironic juxtaposition of comic gaiety and grim conflict is notably similar.
- 34 In my discussion of the "strenuous life" and its connection to sport and art in America, I am indebted to Edwin H. Cady, "The Strenuous Life' as a Theme in American Cultural History," *New Voices in American Studies*, ed. Ray B. Browne et al. (Lafayette, Ind.: Purdue Univ. Studies, 1966), pp. 59–66; Neal Harris, "Introduction," *The Land of Contrasts, 1880–1901* (New York: George Braziller, 1970), pp. 1–28; and John Higham, "The Reorientation of American Culture in the 1890's," *Writing American History: Essays on Modern Scholarship* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1970), pp. 73–102.

- 35** Theodore Roosevelt, "The Strenuous Life," in *The Strenuous Life* (New York: The Review of Reviews Company, 1910), p. 3. Roosevelt discusses his personal experience with boxing and prizefighting in his *An Autobiography* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1921), pp. 28, 40–44. Roosevelt was friendly with several professional fighters, including heavyweight champion Robert Fitzsimmons, and he worked out with Mike Donovan, one-time middleweight champion and boxing master at the New York Athletic Club. See Donovan's *The Roosevelt That I Know: Ten Years of Boxing with the President* (New York, 1909), pp. 3–20. For a defense of boxing in terms of the "strenuous life," see Duffield Osborne, "A Defense of Pugilism," *North American Review*, 146 (April 1888), 430–35.
- 36** F. O. Matthiessen compares Eakins and Whitman in *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1941), pp. 604–10.
- 37** See, for example, W. J. Glackens' wash drawing *The Boxing Match* (1906—Collection of Arthur G. Altschul) and the catalogue of the exhibition "Boxing and Wrestling in Art," *Bulletin of the California Palace of the Legion of Honor*, 1 (September 1943), pp. 43–45. See also Cox, *Boxing in Art and Literature*. One of the most recent of many works that examine the American prize ring and its cultural milieu is the 1976 Academy Award-winning film *Rocky*, in which the hero is, coincidentally, a Philadelphia fighter who does his roadwork on the mountain of steps in front of the Philadelphia Museum of Art.
- 38** Vachel Lindsay, *Collected Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1955), pp. 93–95. Lindsay dedicated the poem to Louis Untermeyer and Robert Frost, and, according to Untermeyer in *From Another World* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1939), pp. 139–44, tried to get Harriet Monroe to bring out a John L. Sullivan number of *Poetry*.
- 39** There are some precedents of paintings and drawings of boxers in the United States, but I have found none by any painter of note. Currier and Ives issued a popular print of the 1860 heavyweight championship fight in England between American John Heenan and Englishman Tom Sayers, as well as portraits of Heenan, Sayers, and later Sullivan and Corbett. See also George A. Hayes's charming primitive *Bare Knuckles* (about 1860), in *101 Masterpieces of American Primitive Painting from the Collection of William and Bernice Chrysler Garbisch*, New Edition (New York: American Federation of Arts, 1962), plate 91. There is, of course, a tradition of boxing in arts and letters that dates back to ancient times, and it was particularly strong in England.

## 5. Deconstructing the Myth, 1983-2005

Eakins studies now reflected the pluralistic state of art literature at the end of the twentieth century. Standard formal and iconographic analyses and biographies continued to be written, but they coexisted alongside radical interpretations. Whereas previous art history was largely empirical, based on visual perceptions and detailed documentation of facts, the new approach to history was speculative and, ironically, ahistorical. American material and cultural studies had begun to infiltrate traditional connoisseurship in the preceding period, encouraging the focus on the object as a reflection and integral part of a larger socioeconomic and cultural domain of high and low artifacts. Not since the emigration of German historians in the 1930s and the resulting infusion of a new cosmopolitanism and intellectualism into what was basically a parochial and descriptive language had American historians experienced such a transformation of the discipline. And many of the late-twentieth-century methodologies were encouraged by the incorporation of ideas from a different European source, this time French critical and philosophical theories.

Writing about art was no longer about history per se. Nor was it just about art, the object, or its creator. The meaning of an individual work was not considered permanent, but malleable according not only to its creator's intentions but also to its reception under different circumstances. The status and interpretative framework of the writer commenting on the artwork now was elevated, equal at times to that of the artist. He or she was a detective rather than a compiler of facts, deconstructing (taking apart) the structure and content of an artwork for evidence of what was unusual with or obscured within its imagery. Hidden meanings in small details, narrative disjunctions, or evidence of biases of class, race, and gender became means to understanding the work of art in a larger context. Texts were problem oriented and often focused on a close reading of a single object.

An interdisciplinary approach promoted a greater contextualization of an artwork than previously. Many of the early exponents of this new American art history and of Eakins studies were students of Jules Prown, who had proposed in two landmark articles from the early 1980s that the study of art as material culture should combine a number of competing twentieth-century methodologies.<sup>1</sup> The intimate study of an artwork's formal properties continued, not in terms of old-fashion connoisseurship, but in

light of insights culled from other fields of investigation, in particular linguistics, psychoanalysis, and philosophy.

The realism of Eakins had always been esteemed. Discussions of the pictorial accuracy of his art were now couched in terms of subjective perception. The question probed was whose reality was being articulated, the artist's, the viewer's, or the commentator's? Michael Fried and others explored the different and sometimes contradictory modes of seeing and representation. Scholars utilized Roland Barthes' idea of the "reality effect," that is, the constructed and mediated nature of seemingly realistic depictions (as in photographic and documentary ones). The emphasis on theory and reception was also related to a greater focus on psychology, in particular psychoanalysis and Freudian concepts, often filtered through the ideas of French psychologist Jacques Lacan. As Marcia Pointon noted, "the body as an organizing trope" offers a useful "matrix in the investigation of socio-cultural processes."<sup>2</sup> Eakins's fascination with the human body, his problematic depictions of the nude, as well as the mysteries of his life and unconventional behavior determined the discourse as scholars probed his identity and psychosocial issues and attitudes towards race, women, and the middle class. Critics of revisionist art history deplored its emphasis on ideology, its eliding of social and historical considerations, and its minimizing of their importance. They also considered its writing style and vocabulary confusing and forced; for example, an artist is the author and a painting a text. In the early years of this period, one's hypothesis and the process of deconstructing works of art often took precedence over determining answers. It was as if the proponents of the new art history had to demonstrate their expertise with those difficult, often obtuse theories. By the late 1990s, scholars presented their ideas and conclusions within a structured framework on discourses of culture, science, philosophy, and linguistics that were more plausible and convincing, and that owed a large debt to the type of social history of art that Elizabeth Johns wrote.

The myth of Eakins the isolated genius had at last been debunked. The new, more theoretical approaches, for all their controversies, enabled fresh insights. By being provocative they not only expanded the field of Eakins studies but offered intellectual grist for future generations.

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1 Jules Prown, "Style as Evidence," *Winterthur Portfolio* 15 (Autumn 1980): 197-210; and "Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture, Theory, and Method," *Winterthur Portfolio* 17 (Spring 1982): 1-19.

2 Marcia Pointon, *Naked Authority: The Body in Western Painting, 1830-1908* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 36.



## Chapter Two. *Max Schmitt in a Single Scull, or The Champion Single Sculls*

ELIZABETH JOHNS, 1983

Glad to be home after such a long apprenticeship, Eakins began his career with scenes of activities that he had missed in Paris—the outdoor pursuits of rowing, hunting and sailing with his father and close friends, and the indoor pleasures of listening to his sisters play the piano. These were activities that in one form or another people had enjoyed for centuries, but in the mid-nineteenth century they were distinctively identified with “modern” life.

He started with rowing. Although he had written his sister Frances from Paris that for fun, sailing was “much better than rowing,” obviously rowing made a better painting subject.<sup>1</sup> He tried one compositional idea with the subject and then another, working from detailed drawings and experimenting with a variety of painting techniques. By 1874, when he finally turned to scenes of hunting and sailing, Eakins had pursued the theme through nineteen careful drawings, water colors, and paintings. The intensity of the chase is evident in every one of them.

The most successful of the rowing paintings, also Eakins’s first, is *Max Schmitt in a Single Scull*, or, as he called it, *The Champion Single Sculls*.<sup>2</sup> Painted with a capability that is remarkable so soon after his discouragement in Seville, it shows much of the varied technique that he would use throughout his career. As he was to do later as well, he filled the work with reportorial detail that was rich in metaphor. And although the subject was anchored in his own experience, it also reveals the extent to which he shared with his fellow citizens their excitement about the pursuits of modern life.

*The Champion Single Sculls* is a portrait of Eakins’s friend Max Schmitt sculling on Philadelphia’s Schuylkill River. Eakins and other oarsmen row in the middle and far distances. The tall, slender Schmitt, in the near shell, pauses to turn and look at the viewer over his right shoulder, his face, arm, and shirt lit brilliantly by the late afternoon sun. He relaxes his right arm, with his left he guides the oars, as his shell “Josie”—its name written clearly on its side—straightens out from a turn and glides toward the viewer’s left. In the middle distance is Eakins, with intent face and a stocky physique. He moves away from the viewer, not relaxing but rowing with concentration, and the sun strikes him and his boat across the front. His shell

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Elizabeth Johns, “Chapter Two. *Max Schmitt in a Single Scull, or The Champion Single Sculls*,” in *Thomas Eakins: The Heroism of Modern Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), pp. 19–45. Abridged. © 1983 Elizabeth Johns. Reprinted by permission of Princeton University Press.

has come from the left, in a gentle curve that parallels that of his friend's craft. These oarsmen have met and passed each other, each on his own mission.

Also absorbed in their own purposes are three other single scullers, in the distance—one on the far right, set off by a red shirt, one behind Eakins, in white, and a third by the bridge pier near the left. Various landmarks identify the location as on the Schuylkill: the Railroad Connection Bridge (with a train puffing across it from the right) and the Girard Avenue Bridge, peculiarly situated at an angle to each other;<sup>3</sup> Sweetbriar, a colonial mansion on the brow of the hill just off the river's right bank;<sup>4</sup> and, in a distinctive red boat near the left shore, a crew of two rowers and coxswain in Quaker dress. The spare brown of the trees on the shoreline identifies the season as autumn. Smaller details complete the scene. . . .

Schmitt is the hero in this personal, fall painting, but sculling, the Schuylkill, and Philadelphia expressed Eakins's proper place, too.

For rowing was an activity that Eakins knew well. He had learned to row long before he went to Paris, first going out on the river in the early 1860s at a time when other Philadelphians as well were trying out this new sport.<sup>5</sup> All the members of Eakins's family rowed—his father, sisters, and his mother; indeed, in their Mount Vernon Street home the family was only a few blocks from the allure of the Schuylkill for recreation in the late afternoons. From Paris Eakins mentioned rowing in several of his letters to his family—in comments that reveal the several dimensions of their enjoyment of the sport: asking his mother if she had been on the river recently to see the fall colors; suggesting to his sister Frances that she go row on the river when she found herself depressed about her progress in her piano studies; and urging that Frances and Margaret should learn to swim well since they rowed so much.<sup>6</sup>

Many of Eakins's friends at Central High School had also taken up rowing, and Max Schmitt, the central figure in *The Champion Single Sculls*, was prominent among them. Classmate Joseph Boggs Beale, later an artist/illustrator, wrote in his diary of being on the river several times a week; Eakins's chemistry professor at the high school and subject of a later portrait, B. Howard Rand, M.D., was even the president of a boating club.<sup>7</sup> Some Philadelphians rowed independently, while others, like Dr. Rand and Max Schmitt, rowed as members of recently formed boating clubs.<sup>8</sup> Joining their new enthusiasm for rowing with an equally new passion for organized activity, several of these clubs in 1858 had founded the Schuylkill Navy to sponsor semiannual regattas and championship races, and the activities brought new publicity to rowing. Whether for club activities or private relaxation, for racing or for exercise, Philadelphians took to the Schuylkill with craft of all

descriptions, and from April until October the river was dotted with citizens in earnest training or just as earnest relaxation.

They were not alone in their enthusiasm. Throughout America, in fact, the years framing the Civil War saw a virtual flowering of rowing and, indeed, of many other sports. With the rise of economic prosperity a substantial number of city dwellers—new professionals, clerks, and skilled workers—enjoyed increased income and, for the first time, notable leisure. Because so many of them were engaged in exclusively mental and indoor occupations, they turned to the outdoors for relaxation. Following the nation's lingering affection for English customs, they chose their new sporting pursuits from English models that they knew through English sporting periodicals. Sports newly popular in England ranged from hunting, billiards, cricket, croquet, walking, horse racing, and yachting to rowing, and of these, rowing had particular attraction for Americans. Favorable rivers and lakes were abundant across the continent, and some of the values associated with rowing in England appealed to the developing American advocacy of leisure that was instructive, elevating, and democratic.

With the passion of the convert, rowing's new devotees in America studied its many aspects. They wrote about its history, its technology, its social implications, its moral dimensions, and, most prominently, its character in America that distinguished it from its English antecedents.

These antecedents had assumed an influential pattern. For centuries, rowing in England had been associated with watermen on the Thames, who engaged in the "trade of rowing" by ferrying passengers in heavy boats from one side to the other. In the course of such ferrying, watermen had become competitive about their individual speed and skill, and a tradition developed of gentry passengers occasionally wagering on the outcome of a ride. . . . [L]ate in the eighteenth century . . . impressed not only with its value as entertainment but also with its benefits to health, students at Oxford began to row informally, and by 1806 students at Eton were rowing also. Rowing became institutionalized. Oxford established an official college rowing club in 1815 and Cambridge in 1827; in 1829 these clubs, rowing in eight-man barges, met in the first of the famous annual Oxford and Cambridge boat races that even today are prominent events. In the 1820s and 1830s gentleman amateurs formed the first rowing clubs, and cities began to sponsor annual regattas. . . . Over only a few decades rowing was transformed into the sport of a gentleman . . .

Printmakers in England had begun to celebrate rowing in the 1820s, when university crews first earned it a respectable popularity. In the early

images of university races and of city regattas prominent motifs included competing crews, spectators in the foreground, landmarks of a particularly significant point in the race (usually the start, the finish, or a moment of changing advantage midway through the race), and sometimes even pen-nants and party barges in the distance.<sup>9</sup> . . . Later, when single sculling championships became popular, images functioned as documentary portrai-ture, showing champions in their shells in a location where they had won their latest victory. . . . The margins of rowing portraits set forth documentary data that satisfied both spectators and champions: the rower's weight, height, and age; an exact description of his boat; the date, location, and even the time of his championship race; . . .

With an important exception, Americans followed the pattern set in England in the development of rowing. The first American rowers were pro-fessional ferry-men in waters around New York City in the 1820s, who, like their counterparts on the Thames more than a century earlier, occasionally rowed wagered races in heavy work boats. Next, amateurs developed an inter-est in the sport, and following the practical—but not the ideological—lead of class-conscious “gentleman amateurs” in London, formed rowing clubs in Castle Garden, spots along the Hudson (Newburgh was a very early one, fol-lowed by Poughkeepsie and Albany), Savannah, Worcester, Springfield, Pittsburgh, and Philadelphia. They began to hold races and regattas and to sponsor championships, all on the English models. Following English pre-cedent set in the 1820s, Americans established collegiate rowing at Harvard in 1846 and at Yale the next year. The first Harvard-Yale race was rowed in 1852, in six-man barges (within a few years it was an annual event), and gradually over the next several decades other universities established rowing crews and regular regattas. Emulating the example of English professional sculling championships, a few American professional oarsmen began to compete for championship titles of various American rivers and regattas. In the tradition of American technical ingenuity, American boatbuilders made technological contributions to the development of the shell, inventing the sliding seat, and later, the paper shell; and they introduced such novelties into rowing practice as rowing without a coxswain.<sup>10</sup>

Although the Civil War interrupted the spread of rowing in the United States, within only a few years after its conclusion Americans had bought approximately two thousand boats and twelve thousand people had joined boating clubs. . . . Stimulated by expanded coverage of rowing activi-ties in the national sporting periodicals and new interest in rowing by the local newspapers, they compared boating among cities, boat clubs, college

and university crews, types of boats, and rowers themselves. Clubs in New York City, Poughkeepsie, Saratoga, Boston, Worcester, and Pittsburgh jostled in the press for superiority in size of membership, number of races in regattas, excellence of their racecourse, modernity of their boats, number of professional races held on their course, and turnout of spectators for rowing events.<sup>11</sup>

Supporting the excitement of the rowing races and regattas were the values with which Americans understood the importance of the sport in meeting the challenges of modern, urban life.

First, Americans urged each other, rowing was useful to the health. Of concern to many modern citizens was the general health of their increasingly urban and sedentary (because clerical and professional) work force, and they characterized each other as “pasty” looking. Hoping that a large number of “indoor” colleagues could be coaxed to the nearest river, rowing’s advocates claimed that rowing benefited the respiration, the digestion, and the muscles of legs, back and abdomen; it imparted a fresh glow to the skin. One devotee even praised the well-conditioned rower as “a study . . . for the sculptor and the artist. . . .”<sup>12</sup>

Secondly, rowing demanded discipline. One kind of discipline was in physical regimen.<sup>13</sup> . . .

Another dimension of the discipline was mental. Rowing enthusiasts urged that rowing was essentially a mental activity, directed by the intelligence. With his brain the rower sought out the most efficient type of stroke and feather—the two parts of the action that pulled the boat through the water—and analyzed them into their components so as to exercise the most complete control over their execution. The “scientific” rower, who made his body “perfectly subordinate to, and a quickly responsive and willing instrument of, the mind,”<sup>14</sup> understood and carefully rehearsed the basic principles of dropping the oar into the water, pulling it at precisely the right depth and tempo, removing it cleanly, and returning it—called “feathering”—to the position to begin the stroke. . . .

Finally, the rower exemplified a “moral” discipline: his mental control prevailed in the heat of a race whether an oar broke, rain fell, or the rower himself became ill. He never set his stroke by that of a competitor, but rowed according to his own, or his crew’s own, studied discipline. To bend to his passions early or late—to speed up his stroke to match the spurt of a competitor—was not to row the race with the dignity the sport demanded.<sup>15</sup>

As discipline could be acquired by all, spokesmen saw rowing as the ideal egalitarian, and thus American, leisure. Although professional men and businessmen could afford the expensive shells and the boathouses in which

to keep them, no one was excluded from rowing; people of more modest resources could form sporting clubs to share equipment. Editors of sporting periodicals wrote that the snobbishness associated with club membership in England “would never be tolerated [in America]; true merit is what we demand; a good head, a sound heart, and an untarnished reputation, will admit a man among the natural aristocracy of this great country, without a prefix or appendage to his name . . . If his hands are callous from honest labor, so much the better; he will have no blisters to prick when he rows.”<sup>16</sup>

These were the public and rational virtues of rowing. Underneath them, and often mentioned by increasingly nature-conscious editorialists, were its more private advantages. Rowing removed one from the hubbub and the noise of the city to the restorative world of nature. Through demanding physical exercise and regenerative scenery one could work out—as Eakins advised his sister—the disappointments and frustrations of modern life. And in the best of moments rowing was positively exhilarating: the special light of early morning or late afternoon sessions on the river, the gentle sound of water closing under the oar and in the wake of the shell, the rush of moving air on the cheek, and, afterward, the pleasant tiredness of well-exercised muscles—these and more were the special, personal rewards of rowing.

Responding to the new public demand, American printmakers drew on the English tradition to satisfy the national appetite for rowing images with sheet music vignettes, periodical illustrations, and formal prints about American rowing heroes and events. General periodicals like *Harper's Weekly*, *Harper's Monthly*, and *Leslie's Illustrated Magazine* featured news of regattas and races, illustrating their reports with wood engravings that ranged from genre scenes to panoramic views of race courses with identifying landmarks to portraits of both individual rowers and of crews in their craft.<sup>17</sup> The interest in rowing had so spread by 1867 that Currier and Ives published their first rowing print.

Much to the point of the painting Eakins would undertake in 1870, that image, “James Hammill and Walter Brown, in their Great Five Mile Rowing Match for \$4000 and the Championship of America,” combined portraiture, documentation, and celebration. It was issued after a nationally followed match on September 9, 1867 between two of the best known professional oarsmen of the period. . . . [T]he image transcends this particular race to serve larger functions: to recognize the new popularity of rowing in America, to celebrate the recent phenomenon of a national championship, to set forth portraits of each of these renowned oarsmen, to document the landmarks of Newburgh Bay, New York, where this and many other races were

held, and where some of America's earliest boat clubs had originated, and to remind the viewer, with background detail, of the history of rowing.<sup>18</sup>

As appropriate for a popular and documentary print, the composition is easily read. It is a double portrait, but the design leaves no doubt of the rowers' relative importance. Hammill, who won the championship title, rows in the foreground position; pausing in his rowing, he looks up as though to pose for his portrait. Brown, disqualified on a foul but widely admired as a formidable rower, bends to his rowing in the middle ground; a posed portrait being inappropriate for his secondary status, his face is visible because he looks over his shoulder to check his position. The overall design of the view is ordered by parallels: first, of the racing sculls in the foreground, and of the background craft following them down the bay; and second, of the matching diagonals of the rowers' oars. This simplicity violates, for the sake of explicitness, the accuracy with which the rowers' use of their arms and backs is depicted. A slight asymmetry relieves the stasis of the resulting pattern: each rower is slightly to one side of the center of the design, balancing it, and the different positions of their bodies give the scheme momentum. The print-maker documents the occasion with margin data that provide the date of the race, time, boat dimensions and builders, racers' names, and the details of the judgments of fouls committed.

Even nearer in time to Eakins's own rowing images—in fact, only a few months before he returned from Paris—an essay in *Harper's Monthly* brought together in subject and illustrations the most important motifs in English and American rowing.<sup>19</sup> The essay reported and analyzed the first International University Boat Race, a race between Harvard and Oxford held in England the previous summer that was the conversation topic of the year among rowing enthusiasts. The article raised questions earnestly debated in the wake of Harvard's loss: the merits of the "Harvard" or "American" style of rowing over that of Oxford; whether there was in fact a distinctive American style; and the "moral" shortcoming of the Harvard crew in not saving their strength for the final moments of the race. Nine prints of the International University Boat Race illustrated the article. "The Start, at Putney" set forth spectator-jammed steamers and guard boats, the competing crews, and on the shore identifying buildings, waving pennants, and the soft summer forms of trees. One of the images of the race underway, "Barnes Bridge," shows the boats about to pass under the bridge as spectators at all points strain to follow their progress. In "The Finish, at Mortlake" the racing craft are shown parallel to the plane of the image in order to dramatize the victory of Oxford over Harvard by half a length; in the background on the river are small boats,

barges, sailboats, and even a steamer; and on the shore are the houses and inns at the finish line with pennants and flags, trees, and spectators who crowd every conceivable space. . . .

The entire repertoire of Eakins's nineteen rowing images is contained in this article and in the Currier and Ives rowing print. In his portrait of Max Schmitt, as he was to do throughout his career, Eakins adopted this visual vocabulary of his times and applied it incisively to his work in Philadelphia.

And this work, in the case of Max Schmitt, was to celebrate a champion. Prints of the Schuylkill River and of the Fairmount Water Works, located on the river, and possibly painted views as well, had featured rowing crews as part of the detail as early as 1835.<sup>20</sup> Yet so unusual in Philadelphia was a rowing portrait as a subject for a painting of local life that on seeing the painting of Schmitt exhibited in 1871 a local critic felt compelled to note the peculiarity of the subject.<sup>21</sup> It was unusual in France, too, where rowing began to develop even later than in America; in 1875 Gérôme gave Eakins a requested critique on one of his rowing studies with the accompanying comment that he didn't know if the subject would be saleable.<sup>22</sup> Whereas painted rowing portraits were not unheard of in England,<sup>23</sup> in the United States the few scenes of rowers seem to have been done in the Boston area. One early such scene, that by A. A. Lawrence, was stimulated by the first Harvard/Yale race of 1852; another, George D. Hopkins's *Scull Race, Boston Bay*, 1856 (Peabody Museum of Salem), depicted some of the first single scull races in Boston. Eakins was perhaps the earliest artist in Philadelphia—and certainly the first American artist of his capability—to paint portraits of scullers at work, to follow the lead of the early printmakers and the photographers and commit the activity to a strong assertion of its importance: to put it on canvas.<sup>24</sup>

*The Champion Single Sculls* reestablished Eakins in his home territory, asserting the continuity between what he had known and done before his specialized studies and what he wanted to paint now, as an artist, and it proclaimed what he had written his friend Emily from Paris—that he was proud to be a Philadelphian.

For *The Champion Single Sculls* is a partisan image. Currier and Ives had celebrated professional rowing and, in 1869, college rowing—themes appropriate for their national audience—but they had not focused on the rowing of amateurs, who were regional heroes. Images in the periodicals of important races in America showed racers on the Hudson, on Lake Saratoga, in Boston, in Ontario, in Pittsburgh—but not in Philadelphia.<sup>25</sup> Despite the



rush to the river in the late 1850s and early 1860s of novices like the Eakins family, Max Schmitt, and many Philadelphia professional men, in 1870 Philadelphia had not yet attracted the national spotlight as the site of huge regattas and brilliant professional races. Yet the Schuylkill River was eminently suitable for fine rowing and was praised as such in the national press.<sup>26</sup> The foliated banks of Fairmount Park on both sides of the river gave it in the summer an oft-cited “emerald” peacefulness. Above the dam, the river was smooth, broad, and fairly straight. The gentle flow of the river downstream gave a pleasant variety to rowing the course upstream and downstream. It was also eminent for spectatorship: it had just enough of a curve to make watching a race an adventure. . . .

Although rowing had taken place on the Schuylkill as early as the 1830s, and a regatta “of some importance” had been held in 1835, heavy barges (two-seated open boats) without outriggers had dominated Schuylkill rowing until the 1860s.<sup>27</sup> One professional race did take place on the Schuylkill—in 1862 the professional single scullers Joshua Ward and James Hammill rowed on two successive days and established the racecourses that became official on the Schuylkill<sup>28</sup>—but thereafter, professional rowing languished until the 1870s. The Schuylkill was too far from New York, the home of most of the professional rowers. Official college racing, which stimulated the spread of amateur rowing in the New England centers, did not begin on the Schuylkill until after 1878.

Moreover, Philadelphians were slow to take up single sculling. Whereas citizens in most rowing centers were actively single sculling by 1860, not until 1866 were the first amateur single shell races recorded in Philadelphia, and these were unofficial, with only two rowers participating.<sup>29</sup> . . .

Max Schmitt was among the Philadelphians to respond to this challenge. When the Schuylkill Navy began the season of 1867 with a new commodore who announced that Philadelphia would “make a bold struggle for boating supremacy in our country,” the subsequent three-day regatta drew immense crowds and the flattering notice of leading sports periodicals in New York. Noting that Fairmount, the site of the racecourse on the Schuylkill, “is to Quakerdom what the Central Park is to Gotham,” they reported that lady equestrians, the Liberty Cornet Band, and “a surging mass of anxious humanity, men, women, and children” jammed the river banks, shores, and bridges, while “the bosom of the river [was] dotted . . . with innumerable craft gaily decorated with flags and streamers.”<sup>30</sup> The regatta opened on June 10 with the race for the first single scull championship of the Schuylkill Navy. Max Schmitt won it.<sup>31</sup>

Between the time of that victory and July 1870, when Eakins returned from Paris, Schmitt raced in most of the regattas.<sup>32</sup> The race of 1867 had secured the single scull championship as an event, and over the next few seasons Schmitt lost the title, won it back, and then lost it again. In Paris, Eakins kept track. His sister Frances wrote him of Schmitt's victory in June 1869. "I've got your letter announcing Max's victory. I am glad he beat & you give him my congratulations next time you see him," Eakins wrote.<sup>33</sup> . . .

When Eakins returned from Paris in the summer of 1870, Schmitt was ready to try for the championship again. This race, held on October 5 with a huge crowd in attendance, provoked even more interest than the first championship, for it drew four competitors.<sup>34</sup> This was the first time in the three years of competition that more than two scullers had entered the event, and it raised considerable pride in the healthy spread of single sculling among Philadelphia rowers. The three-mile course for this race ran from Turtle Rock to Columbia Bridge and back. Although the competitors, all members of the Pennsylvania Barge Club, seemed to be evenly matched, Schmitt won handily. By the time he reached the stake boat halfway through the race, two of his colleagues had already fouled twice and he was three full lengths ahead. As the *Spirit of the Times* reported on October 15, after Schmitt turned the stake he "had no trouble in maintaining the advantage he had gained," and he finished with the very fast time of twenty minutes. His prizes were the championship belt and a pair of silver-mounted sculls, and well-earned publicity as well: one of the earliest coverages of rowing activity in the Philadelphia *Evening Bulletin* and stories in the New York sporting journals.

This is the victory that Eakins memorialized and documented in his portrait: Schmitt had been the first, and now he was again, the "champion" of the "single sculls" of the Schuylkill Navy. Just as Schmitt's achievement as a single sculler capped the evolution of rowing, and specifically rowing on the Schuylkill, so did Eakins's tribute bring to full expression the tradition of rowing imagery and tie that tradition to Philadelphia.

In the first place, *The Champion Single Sculls*, like the prints and illustrations that celebrated rowing's progress, celebrates a particular victory. Although Schmitt first won the championship in 1867, it was the race of October 5, 1870 that Eakins saw; and the double-portrait format of the painting testifies to this expert witness. In the place of the margin-filling texts of the rowing prints, Eakins conveyed with pictorial details the main facts of this championship race. The foliage reports the fall season; the houses and double bridges mark the location not only as the Schuylkill, but, more specifically, the particular three-mile amateur course on the Schuylkill that Schmitt

rowed in this race: from Turtle Rock, through the double bridges to Columbia Bridge, and return.<sup>35</sup> The late-afternoon sunlight reports the time of the race: lasting 22 minutes, it began at 5 p.m. Schmitt rowed in the craft “Josie,” made by the famous boatbuilder Judge Elliott of Long Island, and Eakins suggests the dimensions faithfully: 33-1/2 feet long, 13 inches wide, 40 pounds. He portrays Schmitt’s slim physique, noted in the journal account as 5 feet, 11 inches, 135 pounds.<sup>36</sup>

Secondly, like its precedents in prints, especially the Currier and Ives prints, the painting celebrates more than a specific victory. It establishes that Philadelphia rowing had matured. Here is the Schuylkill’s “Champion, Single Sculls” barely three years after Philadelphians had been taken to task for not rowing singly at all. What is more, four other single scullers ply the river with the champion. The only other craft on the river—besides the steamboat—is a double scull, another notably “modern” craft. In the event any viewer unacquainted with Philadelphia’s bridges misses the point, the crew wears Quaker dress, placing the scene unmistakably in America’s Quaker city.

Through its celebration of a victory and assertion of civic pride, the painting is, and fundamentally so, a portrait. More explicit than a likeness in bust form, Eakins’s image shows his friend—and, not incidentally himself also—in a context of disciplined action that sets forth character. Schmitt is a thoroughgoing amateur, a modern hero who has taken on the mantle of all the virtues associated with rowing. None of these virtues had come to him through aristocratic advantages: both Schmitt and Eakins, in fact, had typically democratic backgrounds. . . .

In addition to celebrating a champion, a notable pursuit, and Philadelphia “modernity,” Eakins’s painting marks the quiet, solitary pleasures of rowing. To do so he modified several of the conventions in the print repertory. A central element of many rowing images was spectatorship, and in *The Champion Single Sculls*, despite the amenability of the format to the nature of the occasion being celebrated, there are no spectators. The late afternoon scene, with the last steamboat down the river, records the time after the victory, when everyone has gone home; or perhaps it evokes one of Schmitt’s daily practice sessions, with the steamboat on a visitor’s tour. With another subtle modification of convention Eakins manages Schmitt’s portrait: Schmitt rows on the scene of his championship race, as do Hammill and Brown, and like the champion, Hammill, he interrupts his stroke as though to present himself to the viewer. . . .

Eakins's transformation of the format of the double portrait that Currier and Ives employ makes a point about his own role in the activity of the painting. Schmitt's head is almost precisely in the middle of the picture, and he is the near rower; Eakins is in the deep middle ground, off center. As in Currier and Ives's contrast between the interrupted pose of the champion and the attention to work of the runner-up, Schmitt relaxes and Eakins (encourager rather than contender) works. Rather than rely on the easy parallelism of the popular image, however, Eakins exploits the curve of the river for a deep space in which to construct a picture of distinctions: one rower works, one relaxes; one moves into deep space, one into the foreground; one moves on a course to the viewer's right, one to the left; one in sunlight, one in partial shade. These distinctions point to the different interests of Eakins and Schmitt as oarsmen. Schmitt is the racing champion; Eakins is the recreationist. Schmitt is a model of the excellence toward which others aspire, but Eakins is no dabbler: he rows intently, and with proper form. He, like many other Americans educated in the discipline, belongs to the large cadre necessary for the excellence of the few to flourish. Eakins, not a competitor, is the authoritative witness to this heroism, a role he was to play all his life.

Not only in compositional subtleties, but also in his palette and painting technique, Eakins gave his portrait of Schmitt a life beyond (and distinct from) printed rowing tributes. His subduing of the bright sky, overlaying of the water with dark fingers of glazing, flat massing of brown areas against the sky—under it all a noticeable gray—evoke the varied uncertainties in human endeavor. The brushwork is deliberately testing, at points awkwardly resigned. Autumn is a season of ambiguity and loss, as things come to an end, even as championships just won recede in importance after the first flush of satisfaction. . . .

Eakins had given him [Schmitt] the painting, and after Schmitt exhibited it in 1871—at the first exhibition of Eakins's paintings in Philadelphia—he kept it in his living room. When Mrs. Eakins got it back in 1930 from Schmitt's widow, it was called simply *Max Schmitt in a Single Scull*, having over sixty years become significant simply as a portrait of the young Schmitt rowing.<sup>37</sup>

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- 1 Eakins's letter to Frances, written Good Friday, 1868, is in the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
  - 2 The painting was exhibited only once during Eakins's lifetime, and that occasion, in April, 1871, was soon after he had finished it. The catalogue for the exhibition, the Third Art Reception of the Union League of Philadelphia, lists the title of the painting as *The Champion Single Sculls* (No. 137). As this chapter will show, the painting honors one champion, and thus the title should read "The Champion, Single Sculls." Eakins's disdain for affectation extended to commas, which he regularly omitted.
  - 3 Both these bridges were replaced not long after Eakins painted this scene; prints in *Philadelphia and Its Environs* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott and Co., 1873), p. 68, show their relationship in 1870.
  - 4 This distinctive mansion, built in 1797, had been incorporated into Fairmount Park in 1868. There is also, on the shoreline to the right of the bridge, a large, apparently stone structure; this may be a boathouse. Although the river banks have been landscaped as a park since 1871, a viewer may still take Eakins's point of view in the painting by looking south from the parking area off West River Drive near the Black Road intersection. In making his picture, Eakins pulled the bridges considerably closer to the viewer than they appear in actuality.
  - 5 Although it does not seem possible now to ascertain exactly when Eakins began rowing, I have assumed that he joined in the rising activity on the river about the time his friends did. The diary of Joseph Boggs Beale (at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania), kept from 1856 through July 1865, reveals that Beale took lessons in rowing in 1863 (entry for September 11, 1863). Beale's diary is excerpted with a focus on Beale's artistic activities in Nicholas B. Wainwright, "Education of an Artist: The Diary of Joseph Boggs Beale, 1856-1862," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 97, no. 4 (October 1973), 485-510. Eakins's letters from Paris in 1867 reveal a long familiarity with rowing.
  - 6 Margaret McHenry, *Thomas Eakins Who Painted* (Oreland, Pa.: privately printed, 1946), p. 3, quotes the letter of fall, 1867 about the autumn colors on the river; the other correspondence is in the collection of the Archives of American Art: Eakins to Fanny, November 13, 1867 about rowing to lift her spirits; Eakins to Fanny on Good Friday, 1868 about learning to swim.
  - 7 Arthur W. Colen, writing an introductory essay to the exhibition *Drawings by Joseph Boggs Beale* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1936), and drawing on family sources for his information, also discusses Beale's enjoyment of rowing, and mentions that he often rowed with Eakins (p. 21). Colen writes that Eakins was a member of the Undine Barge Club with Beale. . . . Eakins's chemistry professor, Dr. Rand, who was later on the faculty of Jefferson Medical College, was president of the Undine Barge Club. Printed records of the club are in the Historical Society of Pennsylvania.
  - 8 Max Schmitt was a member of the Pennsylvania Barge Club; according to Seymour Adelman, Eakins also belonged to the club, but his name does not appear in the club's records at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. Because of Eakins's friendship with Schmitt, he perhaps had an informal rather than formal association with the group. According to Shinn in a letter of January 3, 1867 (Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College), Eakins talked a great deal about "the Schuylkill boating club" during his first year in Paris.

- 9 Gordon Winter, "Rowing Prints for the Collector," *Apollo* (London) 25 (1937), 187–191, illustrates two rare early prints, "The First Cambridge University Crew," 1829, in the collection of the British Museum; and "The Exeter Boar" (about 1830), p. 188. A print of the Oxford/Cambridge race that is fairly common is the much later colored lithograph by A. Lipschitz, of the Boat Race of 1871 (a print is in the Historical Society of Pennsylvania). Winter illustrates an early print of the Chester Regatta, dating from 1854, p. 190.
- 10 According to Engelhardt, *Rowing Almanac*, 1873, p. 28, the first modern single shell built in the United States was launched in 1856 by David McKay. Experiments with a sliding seat—which enabled the rower to move forward to begin his stroke and thereby substantially increased the length of his stroke—were carried on simultaneously in the late 1850s by a number of oarsmen, including the Biglin brothers, whom Eakins painted in 1872. The paper shell was developed by the boat-building firm of Waters, Balch & Co. of Troy, New York, who applied over a frame single layers of paper, each one varnished individually, to produce a craft that was virtually seamless and very fast. Praising the firm's ingenuity, *Turf, Field and Farm* wrote: "Among the many peculiarly American ideas so prevalent at the present time, the very Yankee notion of molding boats from paper, is one deserving of special attention," January 20, 1870, p. 37. The coxswain, who sat in the stern of the shell facing the rowers to set their pace and steer the course, was considered indispensable until the 1860s. In the interest of saving weight and increasing speed, Americans introduced the custom of rowing without the coxswain and developed a steering mechanism that could be maneuvered by the oarsman nearest the bow with his feet. In later college rowing, the coxswain resumed his essential role.
- 11 This competitiveness is evident especially in the pages of *The Clipper* and *Spirit of the Times*, New York sporting journals to which correspondents sent the news of activities in their city; these reports, and often the editorials and reporting of the regular journal staffs, emphasized the relative progress of each region and encouraged rivalry.
- 12 *Aquatic Monthly*, June 1874, pp. 379–380, communication of May 14, 1874 from William Wood. For other rhapsodic praises of rowing's contribution to health, see Robert B. Johnson, *A History of Rowing in America* (Milwaukee: Corbitt and Johnson, 1871), p. 20.
- 13 Rowers used the strictness of their regimen as part of their rowing character; for instance, an article on the famous Ward brothers in *Harper's Weekly*, September 30, 1871, concluded on the triumphant note that "they do not drink coffee, and smoking is strictly prohibited" (p. 909). Many advocates of rowing for young men admitted frankly that they encouraged it because the "abstemiousness and rigid self-denial" of the training had an obvious "good effect" on their morals; see *Turf, Field and Farm*, June 6, 1873.
- 14 Waters and Balch, *Illustrated Catalogue*, pp. 13–14.
- 15 See rowing discussed as "duty" in *Aquatic Monthly*, June, 1874, p. 374; and in Waters and Balch, *Illustrated Catalogue*, p. 145.
- 16 *Turf, Field and Farm*, April 21, 1871, p. 244. For another celebration of the democratic quality of American rowing clubs, see Waters and Balch, *Illustrated Catalogue*, p. 16.
- 17 Both Harry T. Peters, *America on Stone* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Doran & Co., 1931), and Nicholas Wainwright, *Philadelphia in the Romantic Age of Lithography* (Philadelphia: Historical Society of Pennsylvania, 1958), list some of these sheet music vignettes. Historical societies near rowing areas—the Worcester Historical Museum and the Library Company of Philadelphia, for example—have several such images, as well as vignettes on regatta programs. Also popular, and extant in such archives, were stereograph photographs of rowing crews. Among the earliest articles on rowing to appear in a general periodical was that in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* August 11, 1860 on the Harvard College Regatta, July 24. By 1869 they were appearing frequently, especially in *Harper's Weekly*.

- 18 These details include two six-oared shells with coxswain, a reference to the collegiate origins of the sport; a four-oared shell without coxswain, a more modern racing boat than the six-oared; and other aquatic phenomena of the “modern” boating center: smaller rowing craft, yachts, schooners, and steamers.
- 19 *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* (vol. 40), December 1869, pp. 49–67. So important to the general boating public was this race that Currier and Ives devoted their second rowing print to it, “The Great International University Boat Race” (1869).
- 20 A number of artists exhibited paintings in mid-century in Philadelphia that focused on local scenery; the exhibition at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in 1861, for instance, included E. Moran, *Evening on the Schuylkill*, E. L. Williams, *Sketch on the Schuylkill*, A. Z. Schendler, *View from above the Falls of the Schuylkill* (now all unlocated).
- 21 The painting was reviewed in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* on April 27, 1871, by a writer who identified the painting as a “river scene” and went on to note: “While manifesting marked ability, especially in the painting of the rower in the foreground, the whole effect is scarcely satisfactory. The light on the water, on the rower, and on the trees lining the bank indicate that the sun is blazing fiercely, but on looking upward one perceives a curiously dull leaden sky.” The reviewer for the *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, writing on the same day, was more complimentary: “[Thomas Eakins] who has lately returned from Europe and the influence of Gérôme, has also [in addition to a portrait, now lost] a picture entitled *The Champion Single Sculls* (no. 137), which though peculiar, has more than ordinary interest. The artist, in dealing so boldly and broadly with the commonplace in nature, is working upon well-supported theories, and, despite somewhat scattered effect, gives promise of a conspicuous future. A walnut frame would greatly improve the present work.” Eakins may have seen rowing paintings in New York exhibitions in the early 1870s: in his letter to Earl Shinn of Good Friday, 1875 (Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College), he comments that aspects of the movement of a rowing painting he had just finished (probably *The Schreiber Brothers*, 1874, Collection of Mrs. John Hay Whitney) were “all better expressed than I see any New Yorkers doing.” On the other hand, he may have been making a general technical comparison between his ability to catch particular details and that of his rivals in New York.
- 22 Gérôme to Eakins in 1873, Lloyd Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982), I, 116. Before long, however, rowing and regattas would appear in works by French artists: James Tissot painted the *Henley Regatta* ca. 1877 (private collection) illustrated in James Laver, “*Vulgar Society*”; *The Romantic Career of James Tissot, 1836–1902* (London: Constable and Co., Ltd., 1936), pl. 17. Henri Michael-Lévy painted *The Regattas*, ca. 1878 (location unknown, illustrated in Theodore Reff, *Degas: The Artist’s Mind* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1976). An early example by E. Morin, “*Les Régates du Rowing-Club*,” was engraved by Marais for the *Paris Guide*, vol. 2 (Paris: Librairie Internationale, 1867), p. 1511. Paul Hayes Tucker in *Monet at Argenteuil* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1982), pp. 89–120 discusses the rise of boating in France, with Argenteuil as a major center, as reflected in the paintings of Monet.
- 23 Several prints of champions were made from these paintings. The print of “Henry Clasper, Champion of the North” published by Hodgetts, ca. 1860, is noted as being from a painting by J. H. Make; the print *A Boat Race on the River Isis, Oxford*, was engraved after a painting by John Thomas Serres.
- 24 He was also one of the few artists ever to do so, a phenomenon that suggests not only his individuality but the rapid changes that characterized the evolution of rowing after Eakins abandoned the subject.
- 25 For example, *Harper’s Weekly* had covered rowing events in Pittsburgh on November 23, 1867; Ottawa on October 19, 1867; West Point, June 27, 1868; and Boston on July 3, 1869.
- 26 Even the editor of the New York journal *Turf, Field and Farm* praised the Schuylkill, stating flatly that it had the best water anywhere for comfortable boating: June 1, 1867, p. 342.

- 27** Engelhardt, *Rowing Almanac*, 1873, pp. 115–116, reconstructs what was known of Schuylkill rowing after the regatta of 1835. His records of the races of each year specify type of boat and length of course, so that one can assess the character of the sport. Also see Charles A. Peverelly, *The Book of American Pastimes* (New York: published by the author, 1866), pp. 201, 204.
- 28** They rowed a five-mile race and then a three-mile race. See reports in *Spirit of the Times*, August 23, 1862, p. 388, and in Engelhardt, *Rowing Almanac*, 1873, p. 31. The *Spirit of the Times* noted that Philadelphians did not give the race proper attention—that indeed, the main reason the competitors chose the Schuylkill was that it was generally free of craft of all kinds.
- 29** See Engelhardt, *Rowing Almanac*, 1873, p. 117. There were two races this year (1866).
- 30** The commodore was Charles Vezin, described by the *Spirit of the Times* as “a boatman of some years’ standing” and “a gentleman of ample means,” June 22, 1867 (vol. 16), p. 308. For a report on the regatta see also *New York Clipper* (vol. 15, no. 12) June 29, 1867, p. 92.
- 31** Schmitt’s opponent was Austin Street, his fellow club member in the Pennsylvania Barge Club. According to the *Clipper*, the contestants pulled bow and bow for half a mile, and then Schmitt pulled ahead to win by 25 seconds, in a total time of 24:49. The race was also recorded in Engelhardt, *Rowing Almanac*, 1873, pp. 117–118, who reports that the water was “very rough.”
- 32** His participation can be followed in Engelhardt, *Rowing Almanac*, 1873, pp. 119–121.
- 33** Eakins to Fanny, July 8, 1869, Archives of American Art.
- 34** The race of October 5, 1870 is recorded in Engelhardt, *Rowing Almanac*, 1873, p. 121; the *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* covered it on October 6; it was reported succinctly in *The New York Clipper* (vol. 18, no. 28), October 15, 1870, p. 220; and in great detail in *The Spirit of the Times* (vol. 23, p. 135), October 15, 1870. This last report also included a summary of the history of the single scull championship on the Schuylkill in which Schmitt’s early and continuing role in that championship was cited. The race is also discussed as definitive for single scull racing on the Schuylkill by Louis Heiland, *History of the Schuylkill Navy of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Drake Press, 1938), p. 134.
- 35** The alternative three-mile amateur course with turn that Schmitt could have rowed began just above Columbia Bridge, extended north to the Reading Railroad Bridge and returned to Columbia Bridge. On this course, the rower would not have passed through the Girard and Connecting Bridges. The third amateur course, the straightaway (which is now the course commonly used) ran from just below Falls Bridge all the way to Turtle Rock, near the boathouses.
- 36** Schmitt’s age (28), weight, and height, and the specifications of his boat *Josie* (which apparently belonged to the Pennsylvania Barge Club of which he was a member) are reported in the *New York Clipper* (vol. 18, no. 28), October 15, 1870, p. 220. The report claims that the course was actually not quite three miles in length, which would account for Schmitt’s extraordinarily fast time.
- 37** The painting entered the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1934 with that title.



# Realism, Writing, and Disfiguration in Thomas Eakins's *The Gross Clinic*

MICHAEL FRIED, 1985/87

A few words about my approach are in order. First, I believe that crucial aspects of the significance of *The Gross Clinic* can be brought out only by bracketing its supposed dependence upon the scene it claims to represent and by comparing it instead with a considerable number of other works in Eakins's oeuvre, with particular emphasis on the 1870s and early 1880s. This will lead to a distribution of emphasis that may seem surprising, and it also means that the title of this essay is something of a misnomer, since the scope of my argument extends far beyond *The Gross Clinic* itself. . . .

For some time now it has been recognized . . . that Eakins represented himself in *The Gross Clinic*. . . . Such an act of self-portrayal in a multigure composition was by no means unprecedented and in itself might not seem to require further discussion. But there are several reasons why Eakins's inclusion of himself in the most ambitious of his early paintings is of interest.

In the first place, there are other instances of the sort in Eakins's work. For example, in the earliest and most renowned of his pictures of rowers on the Schuylkill River, *The Champion Single Sculls* (or *Max Schmitt in a Single Scull* as it has come to be called), Eakins has portrayed himself rowing vigorously in the middle distance with the name and date "EAKINS 1871" on the stern of his scull. . . . He also appears seated in a distant stake boat signaling with an upraised arm in another rowing picture, *The Biglin Brothers Turning the Stake* (1873); and in still another canvas of the first half of the seventies, *The Artist and His Father Hunting Reed Birds [on the Cohansey Marshes]* (ca. 1874), he is shown standing in the stern of a small boat and poling it along as his father stands in the bow with rifle at the ready waiting for a bird to break cover.<sup>1</sup> In an important picture of the next decade, *The Swimming Hole [Swimming]* (1883-85), Eakins turns up in the right foreground swimming toward the group of naked figures on the rocks. And in a large-scale work that casts the subject matter of a surgical operation in a new format, *The Agnew Clinic* (1889), Eakins is there once more among the onlookers (he is the standing figure at the extreme right), his image supposedly having been painted by his wife, Susan Macdowell Eakins. This tendency to include

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himself in his paintings is all the more striking in that only two “pure” self-portraits by him have come down to us, both dating from a later moment in his career.

A second reason for paying close attention to Eakins’s portrayal of himself in *The Gross Clinic* is that variants of what he is shown doing—concentratedly sketching and/or writing, in any case wielding a pencil-like implement—recur elsewhere in the picture: (1) in the actions of the recording physician who transcribes the proceedings; (2) in those of Gross’s principal assistant probing the open wound; and (3) in the position of Gross’s right hand holding the scalpel much as one might hold a pencil or pen (or for that matter a paintbrush). The figure of Eakins, so obscure and marginal, thus turns out to be closely linked with the dominant foci of the composition and his actions to be keyed to those of its leading personages.

A third reason takes the implication of these last remarks a step further by suggesting that Gross’s stance and demeanor may be seen as analogous to those of a painter who, brush in hand and concentrating hard, has momentarily stepped back or turned partly away from a canvas on which he has been working. In this connection the startlingly illusionistic depiction of the bright red blood on Gross’s right hand may be taken as alluding to—almost as representing—the actual crimson paint that was a primary means of that illusion, as if blood and paint were tokens of one another, natural equivalents whose special relationship is here foregrounded with unprecedented vividness.<sup>2</sup> Viewed in these terms, *The Gross Clinic* begins to emerge not simply as a uniquely impressive memorial portrait or a powerfully dramatic image of a masterly human intelligence at work but also as an indirect or metaphorical representation of the enterprise of painting. . . .

. . . [I]n Philadelphia high schools of the mid-nineteenth century, writing and drawing not only were considered essential skills but were taught as different aspects of a single master skill of eye and hand working in concert. The key textbook was Rembrandt Peale’s *Graphics* (1834), which in a later edition was in use at Central High School during the years Eakins studied there (1857–61).<sup>3</sup> Strongly influenced by the ideas of the Swiss educational theorist Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, Peale maintained that “writing is little else than drawing the forms of letters [just as] drawing is little more than writing the forms of objects,” and went on to provide a graded series of exercises that would lead the beginner from the drawing of simple lines and curves through Roman capital letters, Arabic numerals, designs “taken from the pattern of Furniture Scrolls”. . . , various objects such as an urn, a sarcophagus, an antique ax, and a saucebowl, the Old English alphabet, . . . the Old

German alphabet, and the modern English alphabet in script, both upright and oblique.<sup>4</sup> Other textbooks in use at the school would have reinforced Peale's approach, so that by the time Eakins graduated he had gained a high degree of competence both in fine penmanship and in the elements of drawing, including perspective, and, equally important, he had been thoroughly indoctrinated in a set of practices and a way of thinking that barely if at all distinguished one from the other. When the professorship of drawing and writing at Central High School fell open in September 1862, Eakins, then only eighteen, was one of four candidates who competed for the position; he didn't win it and soon afterward began studying to be a painter at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. But this involved not a change of direction so much as the pursuit of a career that his early mastery of writing and drawing had made seem an attractive possibility.<sup>5</sup>

It is therefore not surprising that representations of writing in several languages—more broadly, of graphic notational systems of all kinds—turn up repeatedly in Eakins's art, though it is perhaps more than a little surprising that this has never been noticed. . . . Works of the 1870s that contain images of writing in a broad sense include *Max Schmitt in a Single Scull* (not just Eakins's signature and the date but also the name "Josie" in slanting capitals along the side of Schmitt's scull); *Sailboats Racing on the Delaware* (1874), which depicts near the top of each sail numerals in red (the nearest boat is number 25). . . .

. . . Two later boxing pictures, *Taking the Count* (1898) and *Between Rounds* (1899), depict brightly lettered posters and, in the latter, smaller signs indicating the press box and the round. Indeed *Between Rounds* is of even greater interest than this suggests: not only is the press box full of men writing, it also contains (to the right of the numeral "2") a sketch artist, who thus fulfills a role analogous to that of the figure of Eakins in *The Gross Clinic*; furthermore, the figure of the seated timekeeper concentrating on his watch, the face of which we can barely glimpse (though we know it to bear tiny marks and numbers), may be compared to that of the chief assisting surgeon peering into a wound only partly open to our gaze in the earlier painting.

. . .

A second, equally important, and not unrelated factor contributing to the thematization of writing in Eakins's paintings was personal: Eakins's father, Benjamin Eakins, was himself a writing master—he taught fine penmanship and engrossed documents in a beautiful, ornamental hand—and the relations between father and son appear to have been extremely close. Benjamin, a self-made man of means, fully supported his son's choice of

vocation, initially by subsidizing his training in Philadelphia and Paris and, after Thomas's return from abroad in 1870, by allowing him to live and paint in the family's home on Mount Vernon Street and moreover by relieving him of all financial necessity. . . . For his part, Eakins clearly esteemed his father highly and perhaps viewed his own career as in part an extension of the older man's. Both *The Artist and His Father Hunting Reed Birds* and another picture, *The Chess Players* (1876), in which Benjamin is depicted watching two other men play chess, bear the inscription "BENJAMINI EAKINS FILIUS PINXIT," testimony to the closeness between father and son. . . .

. . . There is also a rough but to my mind arresting analogy between the portrayal of father and son in *The Artist and His Father Hunting Reed Birds* and that of Gross and his chief assistant: in both canvases a dominant older male is shown standing composedly while a younger subordinate labors under his aegis, and I am also struck by the extent to which the long pole wielded by Eakins in the hunting picture can be seen as still another version of a pencil or pen (or surgical probe) and Benjamin Eakins's shotgun as anticipating the potentially threatening aspect of Gross's bloody scalpel. . . . All this suggests that part of the drama being played out in *The Gross Clinic* involves what Freud was later to term a "family romance":<sup>6</sup> there seems to be a fairly strong sense in which Gross may be seen as a glorified father figure and Eakins's self-portrayal at the right-hand edge of the painting as at once subordinating his persona to that of the older man and, by virtue of the affinity between their respective actions, as establishing a connection between them as well. . . .

The second group of early works that I want to consider are the scenes of rowing and boating that remain among Eakins's most original and admired productions. They are . . . intensely realistic, and one of the most arresting facts about Eakins's early career is that he practiced two such ostensibly disparate modes of realism simultaneously and with equal conviction. I have just claimed that *The Gross Clinic* may be seen as a further instance of the absorptive, chiaroscuro mode, which it carries to a new sublime of explicitness and power. Now I want to suggest that it also subsumes, if not the rowing and boating pictures as such, at any rate crucial aspects of their realism, which perhaps goes part of the way toward explaining why that type of picture disappears from Eakins's art after 1874-75.

For our purposes, the most impressive feature of the rowing pictures in particular is the use they make of reflections in water, a class of motif that Eakins considered especially beautiful and was later to lecture on at the Pennsylvania Academy. Thus we find a reflection of both shell and oarsman

summarily indicated in probably the earliest of all his images of rowing, the oil sketch for *Max Schmitt in a Single Scull* (ca. 1870–71), while the finished canvas, a work of amazing maturity for an artist as inexperienced in picture making as Eakins was then, presents a rich array of inverted images reflected from the mostly placid surface of the Schuylkill: images of Schmitt and his scull and oars, of the trees at the lower left, of Eakins rowing in the middle distance, of the piers of the bridge and, toward the right, of the hillside with trees and of other boats in the distance, all seen against the reflection of the overarching blue sky (though not of the clouds that seem almost to mirror the attenuated form of Schmitt's boat). In other works of these years, notably *The Pair-Oared Shell* (1872), *The Biglin Brothers Turning the Stake* (1873), *The Biglin Brothers Rowing* (1873), and the oil and watercolor versions of *John Biglin in a Single Scull* (1873–74), the surface of the river is covered with countless ripples or wavelets, with the result that the reflections that appear in it are broken, mingling fragmented images of rowers and their shells (and, in *The Pair-Oared Shell*, the dark stone pier of a bridge) with mirrorings of sky and perhaps also with glimpses through the surface into the water. The phenomenon of broken reflections is itself treated analytically in Eakins's lecture notes, and in fact two fine drawings for *The Pair-Oared Shell* survive in which a rigorous perspective construction has been carried out to determine the precise (i.e., minutely approximate) appearance of the reflections that are so important a feature of the finished painting.<sup>7</sup> (Similar preparatory drawings survive for *The Biglin Brothers Turning the Stake* and *John Biglin in a Single Scull*.)

All this leads me to characterize the realist mode of the rowing pictures as essentially *reflective*, by which I mean to allude both to inverted images in water and to an activity of inward representation that traditionally has recognized in the production of such images a natural analog to its own mysterious processes. Reflection in the second of these senses is manifestly an absorptive activity in its own right, from which it follows . . . the rowing pictures are at least indirectly linked. . . . And if we now consider the figures of oarsmen in all but one of the pictures I have cited, it becomes apparent that their trancelike engagement (made all the more salient by the depiction of self-mirroring pairs of rowers) in the physically demanding but also protracted and rhythmically repetitive activity of rowing provides an actional and psychological matrix. . . . The exception is the first of the rowing pictures, *Max Schmitt in a Single Scull*, in which the title figure trails his oars and, squinting into the light, turns in his seat to confront the painter and/or viewer; yet even there the small but exactly delineated figure of Eakins rowing energetically into the distance presages the works to come.

. . . Eakins's lifelong interest in perspective, which incidentally sets him apart from French masters like Courbet and Manet (though not of course from his teacher Gérôme), was rooted in the writing/drawing complex that figured greatly in his early training and, as we have seen, found remarkably diverse expression in his art throughout his career; and second, that the basic structures and motifs of the rowing pictures are such as enabled Eakins not only to bring his formidable knowledge of perspective into play but also, more important, to do so perspicuously, in a manner that allowed a certain relation to writing—to writing/drawing—to come to the fore. I am thinking in particular of the role of the assertively foreshortened ground plane in the rowing pictures and of the implicit analogy between that plane and the horizontal plane of writing/drawing, which in this context must be distinguished fundamentally from the vertical or upright plane of painting. That is, a principal effect of the underlying perspectival structure in these pictures is to make us acutely aware of the surface of the water as an image-bearing horizontal plane; and inasmuch as the underlying structure belongs to a complex of practices that at once posits and articulates such a plane, it is tempting to see in the finished paintings images of that condition of their own production, which is to say of their genesis in writing/drawing. Put slightly differently, the rowing pictures refuse to allow the implied horizontality of the “original” sheet of paper to be wholly superseded and in effect suppressed by the verticality of the stretched canvas. . . .<sup>8</sup>

Even regarding the relation to writing/drawing, however, the difference between the domestic interiors and the rowing and boating pictures is less than absolute. . . . *The Gross Clinic* itself, which I have associated with the domestic interiors and which obviously resembles them far more than it does the rowing and boating pictures, nevertheless relates importantly to the latter in at least six respects.

First, the predominantly male population of the operating room in *The Gross Clinic* is in keeping with the masculine world of the rowing and boating scenes. This isn't crucial to my present argument but is worth mentioning; one might also mention the primacy of a thematics of absorption in both.

Second, the action of the chief assisting surgeon's probe as it enters and partly disappears inside the open wound in the patient's thigh might be compared with the way in which the oars penetrate and in effect are lost to view beneath the surface of the water in the rowing pictures.

Third, a closely related point, the thematization of writing and writing-like activities in *The Gross Clinic*, in particular the parallel between the actions of the chief assisting surgeon wielding his bloody probe and the

recording physician writing with a red pen or pencil atop a whitish lectern, suggests an analogy between the horizontal plane of writing/drawing that I have claimed is figured perspectively in the rowing pictures and, in the later work, the patient lying on the operating table, both of which, patient and table, are also depicted in abrupt foreshortening. (A middle term between the rowing pictures and *The Gross Clinic* in this regard is the magisterial watercolor *Whistling for Plover* [ca. 1874], which portrays a kneeling black man armed with a shotgun and pursing his lips as he whistles, softly it would appear, to attract his prey. All around him there expands a table-flat field rendered in abrupt foreshortening, and in the distance to the left of the hunter a figure of a man—no doubt another hunter—lies on his back with his head toward the viewer and his body at an angle relative to the picture surface approaching that of the patient in *The Gross Clinic*. A second such figure, all but invisible in the illustration, lies farther away toward the right. Between the personage of the black man cradling his shotgun and that of the distinguished surgeon holding his scalpel there is an underlying affinity of conception that could serve as a small epitome of the obsessional nature of Eakins's concerns.)<sup>9</sup>

Fourth, the tray of medical instruments in the left immediate foreground is naturally aligned to allow the doctors ready access to those instruments. But this means that the tray is inverted relative to the viewer, like reflections in water in the rowing pictures or, again, like the words “UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL” in *The Agnew Clinic*, which in this respect may be seen as spelling out a less emphatic feature of *The Gross Clinic*. Furthermore, the deliberate blurring or imprecision of the representation of the medical instruments, usually taken simply as an index of extreme nearness, recalls the brokenness of the reflections in the later rowing scenes, as do the multiple broken contours of the mostly obscured figure behind Gross, another detail that tends to become lost in reproduction.

Fifth, I see a connection between the almost trompe-l'oeil illusionism with which Eakins has depicted the gleaming metal retractors, steel scalpel, and fingers covered with blood (both Gross's fingers and his chief assistant's) in *The Gross Clinic* and the play of light from reflective surfaces and indeed the description of minute engineering details in the rowing pictures as a group. It is as though, at the twin foci of a manifestly absorptive painting whose dramatic chiaroscuro and evocation of an encompassing interior space seem far removed from the bright, outdoor, reflective world of the rowing scenes, we find concentrated the very essence of reflectiveness: shining highlights that confer an extra, in a sense gratuitous, degree of

illusion on the representations of blood and steel (and, in contrast, flesh) that simultaneously attract and repel our fascinated gaze. Insofar as reflectiveness in early Eakins has been shown to belong to what I have called the writing/drawing complex, this is tantamount to discovering a further relation to that complex where one might least have expected it.

Finally, among the more than one hundred works by Eakins at the Philadelphia Museum of Art is a small, thickly brushed and knifed oil sketch for *The Gross Clinic* that seems to represent the artist's first idea for his composition and may have been executed *sur le motif*. As Siegl notes in his catalog entry on the oil sketch, it was painted "right over an old canvas that already had a number of rowing studies on it," and in an appendix to the catalog he reproduces an inverted X-ray of the underlying image—inverted because Eakins evidently turned the original image upside down before starting to depict the scene in the operating theater.<sup>10</sup> I see a suggestive resemblance between the poses of the two rowers in the X-ray and those of three of the four assisting surgeons in the oil sketch, and find food for thought in the implicit analogy between the inversion of the studies of rowers and the prominence of inverted imagery—reflections in water—in the rowing pictures. That the initial image of rowers is no longer visible on the surface of the oil sketch, or that the sketch in turn has been superseded by the finished painting, doesn't make the relation of *The Gross Clinic* to the initial image any less intriguing.

...

We are at last in a position to start bringing this essay to a close. Again I shall proceed indirectly, this time by giving a brief account of a related drama of visibility played out in several pictures of the 1870s and early 1880s, before moving on to a final discussion of the respective claims of writing/drawing and painting in *The Gross Clinic*.

A small, impressive canvas from the mid-1870s, *Will Schuster and Blackman Going Shooting for Rail* [*Rail Shooting on the Delaware*] (1876), depicts the title figure standing in the middle of a shallow boat and taking aim with his shotgun, presumably at one or more birds breaking cover somewhere off to the left, and, toward the stern, a tall black man with bare feet wielding a long pole with which he has been propelling the boat along. The setting is a pond or marsh, with greenish marsh grass everywhere and a few trees on the horizon; the sky is featureless but the rippled surface of the water in the right foreground is alive with broken reflections, and there is a further development of the motif in the curving patterns of light (or caustics) reflected back from the water onto the hull of the boat.



As is true of almost all of the pictures by Eakins we have considered, *Will Schuster* depicts a scene of intense absorption—most obviously Schuster’s as he sights down the barrel of his gun apparently with total concentration, but also that of his pusher, who is shown simultaneously looking intently with tilted head in the direction of Schuster’s aim and doing all he can to hold the boat steady as the latter prepares to fire. What I want to emphasize, however, is not simply the general thematics of absorption in the picture nor precisely the intensity of the absorptive states it represents but rather the quite extraordinary degree of empathy—of something like willed imaginative projection—that each of the two figures seems to demand of the viewer. Thus for example we miss the force of Eakins’s minutely precise and highly finished depiction of Schuster’s head and hands if we fail to grasp, and by this I mean something more than simply note, the exclusiveness of the hunter’s concentration on his target, the weight but also the balance of the shotgun in his hands, even the pressure of his finger against the resistance of the trigger. . . . We are further encouraged to project ourselves into the world of the painting by the inclusion, on a diminutive scale, of the heads of a second pair of hunters in the far distance immediately to the right of the pusher, the leap in size from one pair of figures to the other calling for an abrupt shift of imagined focus into the depths of the scene. I don’t wish to be understood as saying that Eakins is unique in encouraging his viewers to project themselves into and by so doing to “activate” this and other pictures. It could hardly be denied that all paintings require of the viewer a minimal level of imaginative engagement if they are not to remain inert, or that certain types of pictures, small-scale genre scenes in particular, tend to invite close and sympathetic examination of facial expression and bodily gesture. But *Will Schuster* seems to me unusual both because it brings a special urgency to the demand for “activation” and because that demand is oddly inconsistent with, indeed is contradicted by, other equally important aspects of the picture.

In the first place, we are not shown the bird or birds that Schuster is aiming at and that the pusher is watching attentively, so our impulse to share imaginatively in each figure’s actions is compromised, though by the same token underlined, from the start. (Just as in *The Gross Clinic* we feel ourselves excluded from the acts of vision of the chief assisting surgeon and the anesthesiologist, and as in *Between Rounds* we only barely glimpse the watchface being studied by the timekeeper.) . . . More important, the broad, painterly manner in which the picture has been rendered over most of its surface would appear to call for a wholly different mode of visualization on the part of the viewer: comparatively distanced and detached, attuned to the flow of

pigment and the play of brushwork, above all concerned with the total effect of the painting not simply as a realistic scene but also as a worked artifact. (That the figures are depicted more or less in profile, silhouetted against the marsh grass beyond them, is also pertinent here.) The result is a tension or competition between two fundamentally different modes of seeing: one that looks to “enter” the representational field and to identify its interests with those of the protagonist, inevitably losing sight of the whole in the process of doing so (in *Will Schuster* such an identification would direct the viewer’s attention well beyond the framing edge), and another that remains emphatically outside the representation, viewing the painting with something like disinterest but also with special concern for “formal” values of a certain sort. I think of this second mode as “pictorial” seeing (the term is somewhat loaded, as will become clear) and want to leave unanswered for the moment the question as to what the first, projective or participatory, mode might be called. The distancing called for by “pictorial” seeing is further encouraged by the most remarkable feature of *Will Schuster*, the incandescent red of Schuster’s long-sleeved shirt, which by virtue of its coloristic explosiveness repels the viewer from the painting as with the force of a blast. Insofar as it also explodes the unity that “pictorial” seeing characteristically seeks to confirm, it recalls the peculiar, anarchic intensity of the reds not only in *The Gross Clinic* but in the early domestic interior scenes as well.

. . .

In my discussion of the rowing pictures of 1871–74 I called attention to what I saw as an analogy between the strongly receding image-bearing ground plane that is a conspicuous feature of those pictures and the horizontal plane of writing/drawing, which I distinguished sharply from the vertical or upright plane of painting. Putting this together with my analysis of competing modes of seeing leads in turn to the following propositions: that the vertical or upright plane of painting is, although not literally the object of “pictorial” seeing, at any rate the determining form or matrix of that object; that the horizontal, which is to say perspectival, plane of writing/drawing is the arena of the first, projective or participatory, mode of seeing; and that the disjunction between those modes in *Will Schuster* . . . is a particularly clear manifestation of a more general tension or conflict in Eakins’s art between the rival claims of painting and of writing/drawing.

. . . Another characteristic expression of that double “spatiality” is the tension in *Max Schmitt* between the painting viewed as a whole, by which I mean at a commanding distance from its surface (at which distance a world of detail is indiscernible), and viewed intensively, at close enough range to

distinguish the figure of Eakins energetically rowing in the middle distance and indeed to read the name and date on the stern of his scull (at which range the larger composition is lost to view).<sup>11</sup> Here as in *Will Schuster* the “space” of painting is implicitly opposed to another “space” requiring the viewer to “enter” the representation and, once there, to perform feats of reading that are beyond the powers of “pictorial” seeing, including in the present instance an act of reading fairly minute graphic characters. . . .

The opposition in Eakins’s art between the “spaces” of writing/drawing and of painting is the more impressive in that it doesn’t seem to have been a function of a socially sanctioned hierarchy; on the contrary, as I have tried to show, Eakins, faithful to his early education, appears to have regarded writing and painting as aspects of a single vocation. It is therefore especially interesting to find in the primary textbook of that training, Peale’s *Graphics*, a suggestive analysis of a problematic disjunction between horizontal and vertical planes of representation. . . .

. . .

In Eakins’s art, as we have seen, the crucial tension or conflict between planes of representation takes place at a more advanced or anyway a different stage. But the source of the conflict is, I think, the same as in . . . Peale: the mutual identification of writing and drawing that *Graphics* systematically advocates and that all of Eakins’s early training reinforced. That is, I suggest that it was primarily the strength and explicitness of that identification that defined the “space” of drawing as essentially horizontal in distinction to the vertical or upright “space” of reality on the one hand (Peale) and of painting on the other (Eakins). Not that the “space” of writing is always and everywhere intrinsically or naturally horizontal; on the contrary, there have been cultures and epochs that would have found that association positively unnatural (modern technological society may be on the verge of doing so), and in any case the explicitness with which Peale argues his position represents a specific cultural formation.<sup>12</sup> Given that formation, however, the emergence of a sense of disjunction between planes of representation may be imagined to have followed naturally enough, though it is only in Eakins, so far as I am aware, that an attempt to come to grips with that disjunction becomes the implicit project of a large and significant body of painting. (Let me affirm once more that I take Eakins to have been unconscious of the terms of the project as I have described them.)

What this meant in practice was that painting, in obvious respects the more comprehensive enterprise, had to be made to contain or subsume writing/drawing, which in one sense it couldn’t fail to do even while in

another, ultimately more important sense the disparity between the “spaces” of writing/drawing and of painting was such that no true containment or subsumption, certainly no perfect dissolving of the first into the second, could be accomplished. Thus the proliferation of images of writing in Eakins’s pictures may be seen both as representing an effort at containment—painting depicting writing and thereby mastering it—and as an index of the less than complete success of that effort—writing investing painting and thereby escaping its control. . . .

Probably, though, I have drawn too neat a distinction between Peale and Eakins at the same time that I have aligned them with each other. For Eakins himself subscribed to a myth of realism that has him starting out, à la Peale in *Graphics*, from a view of the world as through a glass pane (a passage in his unpublished lecture notes on perspective makes this explicit). It follows that the elaboration of that view into a finished picture would involve not one but two transformations: from the upright plane of reality to the horizontal one of writing/drawing and thence to the upright one of painting. Moreover, the arbitrary, unmotivated nature of those transformations—the absence of any intrinsic connection between one plane and the other—raises the further possibility that the finished work might bear the marks of that double discontinuity, or to put this more emphatically, that its representation of the “real” might be doubly disfigured: as for example by the inversion and also the brokenness of the reflections in the rowing pictures, or by the precipitous foreshortening of the patient’s body and the operation cutting into its flesh in *The Gross Clinic* or simply by the eliciting of opposed modes of seeing, one excessively intimate and the other equally excessively detached. . . .

. . .

*The Gross Clinic*’s hidden connection, by way of its initial oil sketch, to an inverted study of rowers and by extension to the rowing pictures as a group and beyond that to a whole poetics of reflection can be read as at once acknowledging and disavowing a basic involvement with the writing/drawing complex. This might also be said, by analogy with specific aspects of the rowing scenes, of the deliberately out-of-focus treatment of the inverted surgical instruments in the left foreground and of the virtually trompe-l’oeil illusionism with which Eakins has depicted the glistening blood and the steel scalpel and retractors. More openly ambivalent, the progressive elevation of the amphitheater audience appears to belong to the upright “space” of painting at the same time that the downward gazes of the members of that audience, as well as of the chief assistant surgeon and the anesthesiologist, bear an obvious relation to the horizontal “space” of writing/drawing; and of course

the patient himself, by virtue both of his orientation and of his status as archexample of the effects of perspective, amounts almost to a personification of that "space." Conversely, the multiplication of motifs of writing and writing like activity, one of which involves a portrait of Eakins, seems unequivocal, and yet, as I observed toward the beginning of this essay (and have just had occasion to confirm), the erect figure of Gross standing scalpel in hand resembles nothing so much as that of a painter holding a paintbrush and stepping back or turning momentarily away from a canvas on which he has been working. . . . for Eakins the realist painter to have represented himself allegorically through the personage of Gross the master surgeon was to interpret his own enterprise not only as cooperating with nature and causing necessary pain but also, inescapably, as divided or excruciated between competing systems of representation.

This becomes vivid if we consider by far the most condensed and potent image in *The Gross Clinic* of the conflict between those systems, the scalpel itself, which being hard and sharp, an instrument for cutting, belongs unmistakably to the system of writing/drawing, but which being poised in Gross's sanguine right hand and bearing on the tip of its blade a touch of blood—a vital, clinching detail—refers, by means of an irresistible analogy, to that of painting. In my discussion of the oedipal scenario that partly structures the composition, I characterized Gross's right hand holding the scalpel both as a precise focus of menace and, on the strength of a further analogy to Eakins's right hand wielding a brush or palette knife, as an immediate channel of access for the artist's impulse to introject and thereby to identify with the threatening (and healing) paternal power. Entangled in that scenario, I now suggest, may have been a desire to subsume writing/drawing under painting not simply as one representational "space" or system within another but also on a personal, a fantasmatic, level—a desire, that is, to recast his writing father (Benjamin Eakins) as a figure for his painting fathers (Caravaggio, Velázquez, Ribera, Rembrandt, Gérôme) and simultaneously to identify that figure as a version of himself. But even within the oedipal scenario the desire would not have gone unimpeded, and what I have more than once described as a competition for the viewer's attention between Gross's hand and scalpel and the absorbed probing of the wound in the patient-victim's thigh refuses to allow the gleaming, blood-tipped blade to come clear even for an instant from a problematic of inscription.<sup>13</sup>

- 1 For illustrations of works by Eakins cited but not reproduced in this essay see the books: Lloyd Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard University Press, 1982); Gordon Hendricks, *The Life and Work of Thomas Eakins* (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1974); and Elizabeth Johns, *Thomas Eakins: The Heroism of Modern Life* (Princeton University Press, 1983).
- 2 A similar though much less dramatic equation of blood and paint may be found in Courbet's *Wounded Man* (begun ca. 1844, finished ca. 1854); see Fried, "Representing Representation: On the Central Group in Courbet's Studio," in *Allegory and Representation*, ed. Stephen J. Greenblatt (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), p. 123, n. 8.
- 3 Eakins's training at Central High School in writing, drawing, and related skills is examined in detail by Johns in "Drawing Instruction at Central High School and Its Impact on Thomas Eakins," *Winterthur Portfolio* 15 (Summer 1980): 139-49. For general background see Peter C. Marzio, *The Art Crusade: An Analysis of American Drawing Manuals. 1820-1860* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1976), cited by Johns, "Drawing Instruction," p. 140, n. 2.
- 4 The edition I consulted was Rembrandt Peale, *Graphics, The Art of Accurate Delineation, A System of School Exercise, for the Education of the Eye and the Training of the Hand, as Auxiliary to Writing. Geography, and Drawing* (Philadelphia: E. C. & J. Biddle, 1850). The remark that "writing is little else than drawing the forms of letters; drawing is little more than writing the forms of objects" occurs first on p. 43. My thanks to Paul Staiti for a helpful discussion of *Graphics* in the context of Peale's other writings.
- 5 Johns notes that in 1863 and 1864 the Philadelphia City Directory gives Eakins's profession as "teacher" and in 1866 as a "writing teacher" (*Thomas Eakins*, p. 11, n. 10). For a discussion of the competition for the professorship of writing and drawing see Johns, "Drawing Instruction," pp. 144-46.
- 6 In "Family Romances," *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, 24 vols., trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1953-74), 9:235-41. Hereafter cited as *Standard Edition*. See also J. Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1973), pp. 160-61.
- 7 Siegl emphasizes the absolute precision of Eakins's perspective system, in which each square in the "checkerboard" ground plan represents a square foot of reality; this enables Siegl to calculate "that the boat is 35 feet long, that it is moving at an angle of 67 degrees away from the viewer, that its stern is 30 1/2 feet from the viewer and 5 1/2 feet to the right of center," etc. At the same time, he goes on to observe, "this drawing and the final painting are strangely flat because Eakins placed the point of distance [or vanishing point for the diagonals] unusually far from the center . . . with the result that the final painting appears condensed, as if it were the center of a much larger scene, or as if it were seen through a telescope" (Theodore Seigl, *The Thomas Eakins Collection Handbooks in American Art* no. 1 (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1978, p. 56). . . .
- 8 . . . As for the pictures of sailboats on the Delaware of 1874-75, the rougher water sometimes rules out all systematic play of reflections, but the sailors in those works characteristically appear deeply absorbed in their tasks (enlarged details show this plainly). A further relation to writing/drawing may be implied by the densely painted pagelike whiteness of the four-sided sails, which in the fine *Sailboats Racing on the Delaware* contrasts strongly with the brownish underpainting.
- 9 Also relevant here are the painting *Hunting* (ca. 1874) and, especially, the preparatory drawing for it, both of which are reproduced in Darrel Sewell, *Thomas Eakins: Artist of Philadelphia*, Exh. cat. (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1982), p. 26, figs. 23 and 24.

- 10 Siegl, *The Thomas Eakins Collection*, p. 64; the inverted X-ray is reproduced in "Appendix B," fig. 4, p. 173.
- 11 The effect of shifting one's attention from the first "space" to the second is not unlike the experience of looking through a telescope or pair of binoculars at a distant portion of a scene that one has been viewing with the naked eye (the same effect can sometimes be found in paintings by George Stubbs). What makes this worth mentioning is Siegl's observation, cited in n. [7] above, that the perspective system of *The Pair-Oared Shell* makes the painting "appear condensed, as if it were the center of a much larger scene, or as if it were seen through a telescope." This suggests that Eakins not only may have derived the motif of the Biglin brothers in *The Pair-Oared Shell* from the image of himself in *Max Schmitt* but also may have experimented with making the "telescopic" character of the latter image the basis for an entire painting, though to what end remains unclear.
- 12 Benjamin asks whether there is not a "primitive vertical position of writing, for example, writing graven in stone." ("Malerei und Graphik," p. 603, my translation). I should add that part of the interest of the long passage from Peale's *Graphics* quoted in the text is that it seems to reveal a certain tension between writing and drawing, despite the author's express intention at least heuristically to identify them with one another. Indeed there is the suggestion of a similar tension in the perspective drawing (or *John Biglin in a Single Scull*), which includes, apparently as part of the representational field, Eakins's signature in script but not in perspective. (The signature, too faint to be made out easily, is to the right of the figure of Biglin, almost directly below the two-masted ship in the distance.)
- 13 One might say that the oedipal scenario that partly structures *The Gross Clinic* posits a one-to-one confrontation between the painter or viewer and the "paternal" figure of Gross, and by implication between the painter or viewer and the painting as a whole, and that because it does that structure is at odds with the (more fundamental) conflict between representational systems that I have tried to evoke. Put slightly differently, the oedipal scenario would allow the self to "read [in the painting] the confirmation of its own integrity, which is only legible in a specular structure, a structure in which the self can perform [a] supererogatory identification with [a] blocking agent" (adapted from Hertz, "The Notion of Blockage in the Literature of the Sublime," in Hartman, ed., *Psychoanalysis and the Question of the Text*, p. 78; see, however, the revision of this passage in *The End of the Line*, p. 53). But the obvious "blocking agent," the figure of Gross, is also the privileged site of an agon between representational systems that admits of no decisive outcome, while the fact that the "spaces" of writing/drawing and of painting coincide through and through and thus cannot be distinguished from one another in any simple way suggests that neither quite belongs to a specular structure in Hertz's sense of the term. There is thus a double division in *The Gross Clinic*, between oedipal and "paranoiac" structures on the one hand and between the systems of painting and of writing/drawing on the other. Although I have tentatively associated the fantasy of homosexual penetration with (an instance of) "graphic" seeing, I don't suggest that the two divisions are congruent; the truth is bound to be less tidy and more complex. . . .

Finally, I offer the two extraordinary paragraphs that serve as an epigraph to this essay as evidence that at least one other person in Eakins's Philadelphia found the association of scalpel with pen literally inescapable (Samuel D. Gross, *Autobiography of Samuel D. Gross, M.D., with Sketches of His Contemporaries*. 2 vols. [Philadelphia: George Barrie, 1887], 1:176-77).

# Appearing and Disappearing in Public: Social Space in Late-Nineteenth Century-Literature and Culture

PHILIP FISHER, 1986

High visibility like most light comes in a variety of colors. To be notorious or to be infamous may be no more than shortcuts to that final moral neutrality of fame, and as such, more efficient uses of the machinery of fame. As many muckraking journalists at the turn of the century knew very well, a by-product of making someone else notorious was making themselves famous. The owners of the papers in which the great civic exposés of the 1880s and 1890s appeared, Dana, Pulitzer, and Hearst, could also see that once the newspaper fills its front page with the fame-making and notoriety-making process, the newspaper itself becomes news and its daily appearance, shouted from street to street, becomes the most exciting daily event in the lives of many of its readers.

By means of the Armory show of 1913, modern art became notorious in America long before it was in any ordinary sense well-known. Scandal is not the most refined form of publicity, but it does conveniently insert a fact, a name, a product solidly into the space of appearance. The remark of Roscoe Thayer that the most representative man of the third quarter of the nineteenth century was P. T. Barnum should remind us that the public realm in the years following the Civil War was giddy, intoxicated with the newly available energies for the magnification of personality that had been discovered in the economic and political realms.<sup>1</sup> The force of the mass circulation newspaper to create ever new overnight sensations, or faces instantly recognizable to millions of people, permitted the newspapers to create a common focus of attention—the Philippines, a shipwreck, a baseball star, a political scandal—and then to rotate this massive attention from one event to another, from one personality to another.

In the same period, ideas, or “movements” as they significantly came to be called, had available the amplification of voice and message offered by the personal appearance of a charismatic lecturer on a platform before a crowd. The platform had taken on a new importance thanks in part

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Philip Fisher, “Appearing and Disappearing in Public: Social Space in Late-Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture,” in *Reconstructing American Literary History* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1986), 155–88; reprinted in his *Still the New World: American Literature in a Culture of Creative Destruction* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1999), 121–29. Excerpt, 155–62. Reprinted by permission of Harvard University Press and the author.



to the successful use of emotional oratory and staged events in the abolitionist movement and then by the temperance movement with its dramatic oratory, its repentant drinkers, and its ceremonial signing of the pledge.

...

The platform from which moral or political emotion sensationalized ideas, just as the newspaper did events or the department store did merchandise, had also made possible the appearance of an author before the no longer invisible audience. Now the public might have him “in person” while he would enjoy the visceral attention and emotion that his words might, ordinarily in private, evoke. In 1867 Charles Dickens earned more than \$100,000 for a series of crowded readings that made author, book, and audience—“live and in person”—performances that would pose the challenge of celebrity to American authors of the next generation, a challenge that was the despair of Henry James as well as, finally, the source of one of his richest topics. The space of performance invited the writer or artist to imagine, at once, a high cultural form of celebrity and a personal hold on his audience. Mark Twain, with his lecture style and his appearance carefully chosen to create an iconographic display of his role as performer, actor, and artist all in one, was the writer who grasped and managed the intoxication of the magnified and performed self. For thirty years, from the time of his first lecture tour in the late 1860s to his World Tour of 1895–96, Twain was the first major American writer as “star,” a position only approximated after Twain by Hemingway.<sup>2</sup> On a plane beyond Dickens or Twain, Emerson had, in the previous generation, created American philosophy in public as the performance of philosophy and thought before the lecture hall crowd.

## THE PERFORMANCE OF MASTERY

The space of performance is itself the subject of the most important and in some cases most notorious paintings done in America between 1870 and 1900, those of Thomas Eakins. Many of Eakins’s greatest paintings depict the performance of a skilled master before an audience—an opera singer on a stage, a rower before the crowd that we assume lines the banks of the river, a boxer in a ring surrounded by fans, or a professor of surgery before an audience of students. In Eakins’s *The Gross Clinic*, certainly one of the very greatest of nineteenth-century works and, arguably, the single most important American painting between the Civil War and the First World War, what is performed is surgery and the surgeon is seen as a noble celebrity in a world of acclaim that we see made visible in the internal audience of students and professional observers.

Surgery differs from Eakins's other subjects such as boxing or rowing because it is normally a socially invisible act that has for most people an aura of mystery and fear. Eakins brings surgery into public view by means of this painting in the same way that the novelists of Realism and Naturalism or the journalistic muckrakers would bring into the light of public scrutiny the normally invisible and often deliberately concealed affairs of political and economic life. To be prepared to look at this act of surgery was the mark of a society that had set out to face everything. Narrative Realism, the new photography as used, for example, by Jacob Riis in the slums of New York, the newspaper exposé—all had mastered the techniques of seizing attention by means of daring and shock and then sustaining attention by narratives that seemed to permit the public to educate itself about the realities of its own life and times. As Eakins's medical paintings illustrate, that process of gaining attention cannot be done merely by the appearance of what had until then been invisible. What is required is the highest key of appearance: not surgery, but the performance of surgery as though on a stage with a spot-lit star, a supporting cast, a visible audience, and the melodramatic clues of knife and blood, a horizontal, unconscious body, and its proud, vertical assailant. When surgery is not only permitted to appear, but is depicted as performance, the viewer of the painting is asked to regard himself or herself as part of an audience and to become aware, even morbidly self-conscious, of both the details of surgery and the details of observation, of attention, of the respect that creates the star-system of professional experts, and of the great civic drama of the one and the many, the leader and the people.

Dr. Gross himself is illuminated as if he were the star of this medical theater, isolated, erect like a soloist or conductor. The students whom we see are one half of a symmetrical audience. We viewers of the painting are the other half of the circle, but we are witnesses to two superimposed demonstrations of mastery: that of the surgeon Dr. Gross and that of the painter Thomas Eakins, both of whom work with an extended hand holding scalpel or brush covered with the brightest of crimsons, paint or blood.<sup>3</sup> We, as the audience for two performers, also have before us an audience—the students—who instruct us in the intensity of attention that should be given to the scene, to surgery, and to painting. As Gross instructs them in surgery, they instruct us, by their variety of expressions and postures, in the art of observing and witnessing, learning from skill and repaying skill with the reverence and attention that it has earned. . . .

The striking ontological distinctions made in Eakins's painting between the thing-like existence of the anesthetized, faceless, uncovered

body and, secondly, the massified realm of spectatorship thrown into shadow almost as a visual equivalent for the anesthesia, and, finally, the full and singular humanity of the performer is a set of distinctions with profound implications for the larger social world. These ontological levels are given in several other structural ways in the social design of the painting . . .

These spiritual distinctions made in technique, in posture, in human presence are clearly deliberate, even pedantic. We see here a reality that is hierarchical, no longer democratic. It is one of the many images by which the late nineteenth century seemed to be memorizing a new social aggregation for which professionalism, expertise, and performance offered key models. Eakins's paintings remind us of those many civic symphony orchestras, among them the Boston Symphony or the New York Philharmonic, that came to be a key image and ritual of society in late nineteenth-century American cities. . . .

The crafts of rowing, boxing, and surgery that Eakins portrayed as performances are all highly visible physical skills. The boxer's jab, the rower's stroke and turn, the surgeon's cut—each made visible to the trained eye under the pressure of a race, a boxing match, or a life or death surgical act, the pose of assurance and economy that would triumph in circumstances where even the smallest clumsiness would invite defeat. That Eakins considers these to be metaphors for the heroism of the painter who applies his careful strokes to the canvas as the rower does to the river or the doctor to the patient, is obvious. In American painting from Eakins to Jackson Pollock an unusual awareness has been present in the paintings themselves of the dangerous and elegant skills of the artist risking himself in full view before his audience. Hemingway's life-long analogy between writing and bullfighting was another version of this life or death account of the performance of art.

Within the two clinic paintings that exhibit the arts of surgery, teaching, painting, and observing, we find one final and startling exhibition: the exhibition of privacy. The naked and surgically opened body, a breast in *The Agnew Clinic*, offers as the ultimate material of the crowded and surrounded public stage, the most intimate and private physical self. Surgery, by making for a moment the inside of the body appear in a visible space, has in its power a greater nakedness than that of the merely social nude. It is the cut flesh that makes painting and performance notorious.

In *The Agnew Clinic* the female breast is desecrated both by surgery and by the imputation of disease that surgery implies and then by painting that exposes not only the breast but the body within the breast. What Eakins has done is to install his own performance as a painter onto the double

energy of a newly composite public space, one that saw complex undercurrents that linked fame and exposé. The heroic celebrity of the surgeon transmits one half of this composite energy. The surgeon and with him the painter Eakins are seen as stars subject to an extraordinarily reverent treatment that magnifies the greatness of the skilled practitioner. But alongside the energy of enchantment and professional mystification occurs the demystification of the body, of privacy, the de-idealization of breast and groin. The energies of mystification and demystification, of starmaking and muckraking, of celebrity and exposé are simultaneous and draw their energy from one another. The collision of fame and privacy that takes place in Eakins's paintings of medical performance installs American art on a paradoxical and very knowing moral terrain. . . .

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- 1 Stuart P. Sherman, "Roosevelt and the National Psychology," repr. in Morton Keller, ed., *Theodore Roosevelt, A Profile* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967), p. 37.
  - 2 Fred W. Lorch, *The Trouble Begins at Eight: Mark Twain's Lecture Tours* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1968).
  - 3 For an extraordinary analysis of the physical and structural reality of Eakins's *The Gross Clinic* see the essay by Michael Fried in *Representations* 9 (Winter 1985), p. 33-104.

# Sculling to the Over-Soul: Louis Simpson, American Transcendentalism, and Thomas Eakins's *Max Schmitt in a Single Scull*

ROB WILSON, 1987

Eakins is not a painter, he is a force.  
—Walt Whitman<sup>1</sup>

Thomas Eakins's uncanny portrait of his sculling friend from boyhood, *Max Schmitt in a Single Scull* [*The Champion Single Sculls*] (1871), has long been considered one of those exacting naturalistic representations in the painter's sports genre which includes boxers, wrestlers, baseball players, hunters, and myriad rowers.<sup>2</sup> Given the escalating interest by art historians such as Barbara Novak and John Wilmerding in God-drenched landscapes expressive of American Luminism, moreover, this portrait of the athlete-as-artist by Eakins (1844–1916) has generated new interpretations of its Philadelphia terrain and, more compellingly, its tactics of self-representation.<sup>3</sup> A poem based upon this painting by American poet Louis Simpson (b. 1923), entitled “The Champion Single Sculls”—Eakins's original title for the painting—ironizes yet endorses, in its own witty way, Eakins's democratized and all-but-transcendental use of sculling as an American “meditation” promoting unity of body and soul.

Simpson's poem, then, not only illuminates Eakins's poetic of the body but also provides insight into the lingering ideology of American Transcendentalism, especially as this idealist philosophy of the subject has been transmitted from Emerson, through Thoreau and Whitman, to contemporary poets such as Kinnell, Ammons, and Simpson himself. The narrative “practice” of the poem concisely refigures the legacy of the Emersonian tradition, as well as the Pound/Eliot complex of Modernism in its own quest for a unitary image of selfhood, as my dialectical reading of the poem (and painting) will outline.

Eakins's painting of *Max Schmitt in a Single Scull* has been carefully, if rather simply, described in Lloyd Goodrich's catalogue to his critical study, *Thomas Eakins: His Life and Work* (1933). . . . In Simpson's poem, Eakins's painting is translated more complexly into contemporary antagonisms that

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Rob Wilson, “Sculling to the Over-Soul: Louis Simpson, American Transcendentalism, and Thomas Eakins's *Max Schmitt in a Single Scull*,” *American Quarterly* 39 (Autumn 1987): 410–30. Excerpts. © 1987 American Studies Association. Reprinted by permission of The Johns Hopkins University Press. Courtesy of the author.

signify the theme of double identity that was crucial to the symbolism of American Transcendentalism.<sup>4</sup> That is, Simpson interprets the painting as a rehearsal of that Romantic relationship, posited originally by Emerson in “The Transcendentalist” and related essays from 1836 to 1844 of a “double consciousness” that obtains between the ego and the Over-Soul. As Simpson shows, that consciousness figured forth a doubleness of body and soul that would transform the subject from a stance of alienated diminishment into one of self-unified godhead.

Simpson’s poem, “The Champion Single Sculls,” reads in full:

Green leaves lit by the sun,  
the rest deep in shadow . . .  
a tree is an adequate symbol  
of inner or spiritual life.  
 (“The natural object,” said E.P.,  
 “is always the adequate symbol.”)

It wasn’t just characters . . .  
one heard that successful men,  
corporation executives, were into  
transcendental meditation.  
But now they have given it up,  
they are into tennis and running.

Though I have prayed with Eliot,  
“Teach us to sit still,” this could be laziness,  
and life could be very dull.  
Besides, the wicked are not still,  
they are sharpening a sword.

Stillness, said a picture,  
is not being immobile,  
but a clear separation  
of the self from its surroundings  
while taking part (we must take part,  
how else are we to live?)

“Max Schmitt in a Single Scull”. . .  
A river with iron bridges . . .

Schmitt is resting on his oars,  
looking toward the observer,  
“both in and out of the game.”  
Rowing! This is what I have to practice.

As winner of the amateur single scull races held by the “Schuylkill Navy” in 1867, 1870 (the race Eakins witnessed), and 1872, Schmitt’s champion sculling is read by Simpson not so much as a physical activity, which of course it is, but as spiritual exercise, a “practice” which can confer upon the workaday self access to unitary consciousness. This self-altered identity is embodied in the action of an athlete at one with the praxis of manual labor: in Simpson’s poem, this lawyer-turned-sculler becomes a latter-day figure for that self-reliant or Emersonian godhead. Sculling his way beyond workaday pain and limitation into some luminous state of consciousness, *homo faber* is transformed into *homo ludens*.

Moreover, the textual density of this poem, as read in relation to Sections 4 and 5 of “Song of Myself,” as well as in relation to the *Schmitt* painting upon which Simpson’s transcendentalist intuitions are based, comments upon our culture’s preoccupation with sport, that American quest pursued alike by Eakins, Whitman, and Simpson to invent a holistic form of transcendence which could compensate for larger social divisions of labor enforced upon the subject.

### Representing “Double Consciousness”

Simpson’s representation of the body-soul unity in the *Schmitt* painting should recall, . . . the canonical visions of Emerson himself, especially as his abstract poetic became embodied in the labors of Thoreau at Walden Pond and the Body Electric of his ephoebe, Whitman, in poems such as “Song of Myself” and “I Sing the Body Electric.” Physically robust and body-conscious himself, Eakins wrestled while in Paris, hunted plover in the Jersey marshes, rode horses and lariatied in the Dakotas, bicycled long distances with artist friends, sailed on the Delaware, and sculled frequently on the Schuylkill with champion oarsmen such as Max Schmitt, as this painting represents. Later, Eakins’s commitment to portraying human anatomy, in defiance of genteel prudery, caused his dismissal from the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in 1886, just as Whitman’s graphic eroticism in “Calumus” and “Children of Adam” had barred that poet’s work from Emerson’s *Parnassus* in 1874.

Whitman recognized a stylistic kinship with Eakins. In fact, he praised Eakins's non-heroic portrait of him, completed in 1888, claiming to his biographer Horace Traubel that "Eakins is essentially a god man not a school man."<sup>5</sup> Building upon Simpson's speculations about just this issue, I will claim that Eakins's sculler painting of Schmitt as "god man" does indeed contain traces of such transcendental textuality, especially in its image of self-reliant access to the Over-Soul by the Body Electric of the athlete. Emerson's "double consciousness" depends upon a bifurcated self that could function at once in and out of social fact: it is this *transcendental self*, as revisioned in the Whitmanic tradition of bodily exuberance, that is figured forth for Simpson in Eakins's athlete, who is both within and detached from the physical action of sculling, "watching and wondering" at the stunned viewer/reader.

Sylvan Schendler has already called attention to the analogous relationship between the painting and the imagery of the Transcendentalist poet: "The painting [of Max Schmitt] is not in the mode of Whitman's 'Crossing Brooklyn Ferry,'" he has argued, "but its theme is strongly reminiscent of Whitman's identification with the spectator a century or centuries distant."<sup>6</sup> It is as if Eakins, through Schmitt, gazes out from that transcendent space of consciousness captured by the river-crossing Whitman in "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry":

Consider, you who peruse me, whether I may not in  
unknown ways be looking upon you.

Such a reading accurately assumes, as I will argue, that in his artistic vow "to peer deeper down into the heart of American life" rather than into European sources for models of sublimity, Eakins had peered deeply into the language of American Transcendentalism, to image forth implicitly its motif of double-consciousness in the body of his Central High School friend.

This neo-Kantian (and even Hindu-influenced) theme of a Double Consciousness splitting the subject into alien halves and disjunctive activities had been a literary commonplace at least since Emerson's formulations in "The Transcendentalist" (1842) reified such self-division as the struggle between the symbol-making imagination and the world of commodity usage. . . . In order to transcend subjugation of the body to materialism and the "State Street" order of "the sturdy capitalist," Emerson proposed to unlock an influx of spiritual energy "as flowing perpetually outward from an invisible, unsounded center in himself, center alike of him and of them [the Materialists], and necessitating him to regard all things as having a subjective or relative



existence, relative to that aforesaid Unknown Center of him" (203). So Jonathan Bishop . . . can argue that for Emerson this *action* meant primarily an event in trope-making, a way of seeing—symbolically—a unity otherwise lacking in daily life, as in the credo of "Man Thinking" from "The American Scholar": "The soul active sees absolute truth and utters truth, or creates."<sup>7</sup>

Hence, *seeing*, *uttering*, and *creating*, verbs typifying the power Emerson seeks from that "Unknown Center" of bodily energy, are only minimally physical events. That is, Emersonian action is primarily an event of discursive (symbolic) transformation of the self, the poet's labor to achieve what Julie Ellison has traced from 1821 to 1838 as his vision of an "analytical sublime."<sup>8</sup> As portrayed in "Circles" (1840), when such transcendental power from the Over-Soul flows into the body, the God-empowered ego "sees that the energy of the mind is commensurate with the work to be done, without time." The bodily self, then, is *in* but not *of* matter or time.

Similarly, in a physical revisioning of Transcendentalist ideals, Thoreau made his agrarian labors at *Walden* (1854) into the play of "a certain doubleness," at once embodying the material act of growing beans *and* the symbolic one of generating tropes. Conscious of himself as both within yet beyond social embodiment, in "Solitude" Thoreau paradoxically depicted his own "doubleness" of consciousness, as if he was both player (Arjuna, the warrior) and spectator (Krishna, the godhead) of his transcendental pastoral at Walden Pond. . . This doubleness of a timebound self, subjected to anxiety and self-division (and separated from a transcendental soul aloof from history as from nature), implicated Thoreau in a labor of consciousness that is represented in *Walden* equally as a history of self-absence and of self-presence. Which is to say, Thoreau became reflexive witness of his own body immersed in the costs of social competition, as did Whitman and Eakins's *Schmitt*. . . .

Thoreau's transcendental self, given to abstraction and to intuitions of unity as much as to immersion in nature's or society's flux, was also depicted moving in and out of the rowing experience in *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* (1849), as well as the farming enterprise at *Walden*, where "some must work in fields if only for the sake of tropes and expression, to serve a parable-maker one day" (108). Thoreau, as transcendental shepherd in his self-chosen field, was in but not of nature, mining labor less for beans and wool than for symbols of private autonomy. . . .

Displaced from contact with that transcendental center of selfhood, "the real Me," the ego of the writer was abandoned to the flux of pure materiality, as in these rueful lines from Whitman's "As I Ebb'd With the Ocean of Life" (1859-81):

Aware now that amid all that blab whose echoes recoil upon  
me I have not once had the least idea who or what I am, But  
that before all my arrogant poems the real Me stands yet  
untouch'd, untold, altogether unreach'd . . .

Even Hawthorne, writing to his fiancée from Brook Farm in 1841, resorted to the transcendental tactic of doubleness to express his smug superiority to the “spectral” self of physical labor: “The real Me was never an associate of the community; there has been a spectral Appearance there, sounding the horn at day-break, and milking the cows, and hoeing potatoes, and raking hay, toiling and sweating in the sun, and doing me the honor to assume my name.”<sup>9</sup>

Likewise, what Eakins represents in *Max Schmitt* is not so much the green trees and vistas of the Schuylkill River as his own version of “double consciousness,” objectified and fleshed out through an idealized self-image in Max Schmitt. As a complex sign of the Double Consciousness vividly portrayed in Whitman’s “Song of Myself (Section 4), Eakins analogously represents himself as *both* a man of action (the sculler) and a man of reflection (the painter), working and watching himself work. This double selfhood is objectified in the imagery of the two skulls, one bearing the resting Schmitt and the other the hidden signature of the rowing Eakins, as if in some ironic reversal of their social roles.<sup>10</sup> Even the physical action of the athlete manifests spiritual “in action,” the steady witnessing of a detached consciousness that transcendently looks down upon the body as if at the labors of another history-entrapped ego, remote from the ontological “Me Myself” privileged by Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman at mid-century as the center of American Transcendentalism. Conversely, even the artist is an athlete, rowing (painting) and watching himself row (paint).

Although our only record of Eakins’s reading Whitman is a letter of Dec. 22, 1898, Weda Cook Addicks recalled that when she was posing for *The Concert Singer* in the early 1890s, the painter spoke admiringly of Whitman’s style and often quoted his verses, particularly those about the body and his portrayal of laborers.<sup>11</sup> Tellingly enough, Traubel’s criticism of Eakins’s portrait, *Walt Whitman* (1887–88), complained of an over-emphasis upon the aging body of Whitman at the expense of expressing his soul or vitality of consciousness: “Even Eakins seems to me to have caught Whitman as he said, ‘I have said that the soul is not more than the body,’ than as he said, ‘I have said that the body is not more than the soul.’”<sup>12</sup> In order to represent accurately the Body Electric at the center of Whitman’s project, Traubel saw that *both* body and soul had to be represented in an engagement of consciousness and flesh, spirit and matter (as in the Schmitt painting).

If Whitman's later poems such as "Passage to India" became more abstracted and less bodily, Eakins's movement is in the other direction towards portraying the body as a fact of material bulk, less troubled with the quest for self-consciousness, hence depicted in more claustrophobic and less natural spaces as in, say, *William Rush Carving His Allegorical Figure of the Schuylkill River* (1908). In his massive paintings of the professional Biglin brothers, as well, such as *The Biglin Brothers Practicing* (1872; also known as *The Pair-Oared Shell*), Eakins ironically captured mere mechanical efficiency, a kind of brute force doubled into repetitive strokes as in some piston-like subordination of the flesh to the will. Yet in his painting of Schmitt Eakins was representing self-consciousness, the gaze of privacy and self-transcendence within the athlete-artist. . . . Mysteriously, Eakins's interest in painting rowers ended in 1874, around the time that Schmitt, his transcendental double or *alter ego* for portraying such body-soul unity, retired from competitive sculling at 30, due to aging and the pressures of office work as a lawyer.

Perhaps this development and abandonment is prefigured in an ironic "machine in the garden" motif of interrupted pastoral-idyll suggested in *Max Schmitt*, through distant signs of steamboat and train whose powerful motions across and toward the rower show little deference to the gaze of the self-absorbed athlete.<sup>13</sup> Thus, the painting can be read, after Leo Marx, as another tough-minded American pastoral, the Fairmount Park world of sky and water and tree as disturbed by the emerging forces of technology, as is the body/mind relationship of the rower. By contrast, the portrait of *John Biglin in a Single Scull* (1873-74) eschews this complex theme of self-doubling, suggesting instead the portrayal of a body frontally immersed in nature (and labor) without any hint of that transcendental consciousness captured in the reflexive imagery of the *Max Schmitt* painting, which gives it such uncanny cultural power. In the latter work, sculling becomes a lyric sport, embodying the transcendental reach of the self beyond manual labor.

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1 Horace Traubel, *With Walt Whitman in Camden* (New York, 1961), 1:284.

2 For a social analysis of this sculler painting as a masterwork in its genre, see Elizabeth Johns, *Thomas Eakins: The Heroism of Modern Life* (Princeton, 1983), Chap. 2, "Max Schmitt in a Single Scull, or The Champion Single Scull," 19-45; on sedimented thematics of self-representation and Eakins's figural ironizing of realism, see Michael Fried, "Realism, Writing, and Disfiguration in Eakins's *Gross Clinic*," *Representations* 9 (1985): 33-104; and idem, "How Modernism Works: A Response to T. J. Clark," *The Politics of Interpretation*, ed. W. J. T. Mitchell (Chicago, 1983), 221-38. The standard reading of Eakins as American Naturalist combining a pagan sensuousness with new technologies of science (especially in his use of photography and geometry) remains Lloyd Goodrich,

- Thomas Eakins: His Life and Work* (New York, 1933), and idem, *Thomas Eakins*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, Mass., 1982). More compellingly, conspicuous processes of technical mastery in Eakins's paintings are related to demands of capital in Philip Fisher, "Appearing and Disappearing in Public: Social Space in Late-Nineteenth Century Literature and Culture," *Reconstructing American Literary History*, ed. Saevan Bercovitch (Cambridge, Mass., 1986), 157–74.
- 3 On the influence of American Luminism upon the Paris-trained yet singular Eakins, see John Wilmerding, ed. *American Light: The Luminist Movement, 1850–1875* (New York, 1980), esp. 146–49 and 287–89; Barbara Novak, "Thomas Eakins: Science and Sight," in *American Painting of the Nineteenth Century* (New York, 1969), 191–210; and idem., *Nature and Culture: American Landscape and Painting, 1825–1875* (New York, 1980). For a post-structuralist way of reading the pictorial sublimity of this movement, see Bryan Jay Wolf, "Epilogue: From Allston to Luminism," in *Romantic re-Vision: Culture and Consciousness in Nineteenth Century American Painting and Literature* (Chicago, 1982), 239–47.
  - 4 Simpson's poem appeared in a special number of *Ploughshares* edited by Donald Hall (8 [1983]: 70–11). For a discussion of Simpson's poetry in relation to American poetic mythology, see, for example, Bruce Bawer, "Louis Simpson and American Dreams," *Arizona Quarterly* 40 (1984): 147–62.
  - 5 Horace Traubel, *With Walt Whitman*, 266.
  - 6 Sylvan Schendler, *Eakins* (Boston, 1967), 33.
  - 7 Jonathan Bishop, *Emerson on the Soul* (Cambridge, Mass., 1964), 66–97.
  - 8 Julie Ellison, "Emerson's Sublime Analysis," *Bucknell Review* 28 (1983): 42–62. I explain the endemic split between symbol making and commodity-labor more fully in "Literary Vocation as Occupational Idealism: The Example of Emerson's 'American Scholar,'" forthcoming in *Cultural Critique*. Also see Frank Lentricchia, "The Return of William James," *Cultural Critique* 4 (1986): 5–31, on symbolic possession in Emerson.
  - 9 Walt Whitman, "As I Ebb'd with the Ocean of Life," *Leaves of Grass: Comprehensive Reader's Edition* (New York, 1965), 254; Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Blithedale Romance*, ed. Seymour Goss and Rosalie Murphy (New York, 1978), 237 [from Hawthorne's letter to Sophia Peabody, Sept. 3, 1841].
  - 10 This "double consciousness" theme has been read as Eakins's writer-like struggle with the mimetic illusion of nineteenth-century "realism," an attempt to represent the absented self of the painter observing the presented (an idealized) self of the athlete/artist observing, in Michael Fried, "Realism, Writing, and Disfiguration in Thomas Eakins's *Gross Clinic*," 41–45, and 62–66.
  - 11 Lloyd Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins* (1982), 2: 31, 321. While in Paris in 1868, Eakins pursued an acute study of literature and language: "he sent her [Franny, his sister] exhaustive discussions of the poet's [Dante's] imagery, action, and language, stressing his concreteness and exactness. . . . From Dante he embarked on lengthy analyses of languages, English, French, Italian, Spanish, Latin, Greek: derivations of words; comparisons of words for the same thing in different languages; grammar declensions, conjugations, and so on." Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins*, I:37.
  - 12 Horace L. Traubel, Richard Maurice Bucke, and Thomas B. Harned, eds., *In re Walt Whitman* (Philadelphia, 1891), 144.
  - 13 See Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (New York, 1964), esp. on Thoreau, 245–65, and George Inness's painting of *The Lackawanna Valley* (1855), 220–22, 251.

## Chapter 2. Sutcliffe in England, Eakins in America

ALLEN ELLENZWEIG, 1992

The literalness of the camera posed a serious problem to photographers dealing with the nude in the nineteenth century. While the camera documented empirical reality, warts and all, photographers needed to reach toward an ideal as it had formerly been generalized in painting and sculpture. This tension influenced the way homoeroticism was expressed in photography: if the nude was otherwise “vulgar,” even pornographic, the use of classical motifs certified the male body as a valid aesthetic object. Of this period Aaron Scharf has noted, “However suggestively disposed, however inventively exposed, propriety was satisfied so long as pornography was made palatable by the convenient remoteness of the antique, of history or some other exotic setting.”<sup>1</sup>

But images of men *together*, especially when nude or partially clothed, needed some additional sanction if charges of lewdness or indecency were to be forestalled. Fortunately, in the pre-Freudian era of the second half of the nineteenth century, an ample structure of rationales was available. There was what Peter Gay terms “the cult of friendship,” which “permitted men to declare their love for other men—or women for other women—with impunity.”<sup>2</sup> Then, especially among men of social and economic status, there was institutionalized sex-segregation of the kind Gay characterizes as “clubland,” including “sports, the army, government, the higher reaches of trade and industry, and the rest of the all-male preserves like the universities and the professions.” “Clubland” acted as a fortress against the encroachments of the women’s rights advocates, and its exclusively male membership fought against “being compelled to grow up, of having to abandon persistent adolescent ties, with their distinctly, though largely unconscious, homoerotic pleasures.”<sup>3</sup> Finally, various criminological and medical categorizations of same-sex “indecencies” would not yet take hold firmly until the last decade of the century. According to Jeffrey Weeks, who offers us the specific English situation, “as late as 1871, concepts of homosexuality were extremely undeveloped both in the Metropolitan Police and in high medical and legal circles, suggesting the absence of any clear notion of a homosexual category or any social awareness of what a homosexual identity might consist of.”<sup>4</sup>

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Allen Ellenzweig, “Chapter 2. Sutcliffe in England, Eakins in America,” in *The Homoerotic Photograph: Male Images from Durieu/Delacroix to Mapplethorpe* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992). Excerpts, 16–17, 21–34, notes 212. Copyright © 2010 Columbia University Press. Reprinted by permission.

Thus, to the extent that a group homosexual identity had not yet been recognized and demonized, all relations between men, excluding obvious sexual ones, were available for picturing. This is not to suggest that individual images could not run afoul of moralizers and censors, as we will see. Nor did specific homosexual activities, while unnamed as such, go unrecognized in numerous official quarters. Yet by and large, close physical intimacy, even between unclothed participants, was available as an expression of the abiding loyalties of colleagues, comrades, and companions. These elements are crucial as background to understanding the nature of homoerotic elements apparent in the photographs of Frank Meadow Sutcliffe (1853-1941), working in England, and Thomas (Cowperthwaite) Eakins (1844-1916) in America.

Whatever similarities they share in their use of male subjects, their stylistic differences are striking. The son of a painter, and well schooled in the history of art, Sutcliffe treated the photographic print as an autonomous aesthetic entity. This resulted in images with highly considered compositions and smooth tonal surfaces. For Eakins, on the other hand, the photograph was merely an ancillary tool of his more ambitious work in painting and sculpture. Though in America his photographs are today held in the highest regard, in some respects eclipsing interest in his work as our greatest realist painter of the previous century, his own uses for the camera were doubtless secondary. Many of his figure studies have the affectless quality of the functional document (the passport photo, for example) or the insouciance of the family snapshot. . . .

Like Sutcliffe, the American realist painter Thomas Eakins also had one foot in the classical world. During the period 1882-84 his use of classical motifs was explicit. He was making bas-reliefs and paintings on the theme of Arcadia. In his preparations, he made a number of photographs of male nudes, both of youths and adults, posed as Pan. But among his most evocative photographs of a Hellenic character are a series which do not anticipate the Arcadian sculptures. They are independent photographic compositions. Each achieves a surprising completeness of vision given Eakins's frequent use of the camera to sketch out ideas. Nor do these pictures have the informal home-snap-shot character of many of his sympathetic portraits of friends and family, including those of his wife Susan Hannah MacDowell. Their value to the present study is in locating the artist's homoeroticism in a context closest to a spiritualized Platonic ideal. This very ideal conveys the quality of his own relationships with his male students at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts.

In this series of images, Eakins has posed his students in Grecian-style togas in front of plaster casts of classical statuary. The pictures were taken in the rooms where the casts were held at the Pennsylvania Academy. In one photo, three young men line up half turned in a manner that recalls figures in a Greek frieze.<sup>5</sup>

...

A similar reflective quality appears in a picture of two students, again in Grecian costume, standing before another series of plaster casts. Here, one figure stoops and appears to be drawing on the floor while the other, standing, looks down as if receiving instruction. The ideal of a mutual intellectual enrichment suppresses any erotic motive between the men, at least on the surface. However, when we realize that the statue behind them is the goddess Aphrodite, the photograph becomes more equivocal. One of the Hellenic precepts that codified and gave shape to Athenian homosexual courtship was the exchange between an older man and his beloved, who would yield to the respectful pursuit of the mature lover in the belief that he could thereby improve himself both intellectually and spiritually. In Plato's *Symposium*, Pausanias, one among several speakers in a rhetorical competition on the theme of love, offers an account of such relations. . . .<sup>6</sup>

To judge from the relation of the figures in Eakins's photograph, the statue of the love goddess represents a Heavenly Aphrodite who appeals to the higher spiritual plane on which nongenital amorous affairs may occur. She probably conveys to us the only kind of affectionate bonding between men that would have been approved in Eakins's provincial Philadelphia society. Certainly, to physicalize such affection required socially prescribed forms; even so, the physical expression of comradely *adhesion*, to use Walt Whitman's term, will prove ultimately ambivalent in Eakins's photographs. We need to remind ourselves that with Eakins, as with Sutcliffe, we are still dealing with the pre-Freudian era, a time when in certain settings nudity would not necessarily have been regarded as suspect or suggestive of sexual license. Whatever cast we choose to give to the subconscious motives of these men, it is not at all likely that they or their contemporaries would have been aware of so concrete a concept as homoeroticism.

Eakins was avid about human anatomy, which he had studied at Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia and under the tutelage of French academician Jean-Louis Gérôme at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris. He sought logical opportunities to observe men in the most expressive athletic postures: swimming, rowing, boxing, and—in a photograph preparatory to a subsequent painting—wrestling. These forms of close physical contact

yielded opportunities for physical intimacy that, in a clearly amorous context, would have been quickly improved.

In *The Wrestlers*, the locked embrace of the two men cannot help but arouse in the modern viewer a measure of skepticism. The Greco-Roman style of combat required, in true Spartan fashion, the rivals' complete nudity. An occasion was thereby created for a kind and quality of closeness that might or might not have an erotic dimension for the participants. It likewise might appear a prelude to sexual release for any audience predisposed to reading into sweaty naked combat a parallel to sexual intercourse. In this way, the antique style of wrestling speaks to us about the motives of the combatants as well as the interests of the spectators. K. J. Dover, in his commanding study *Greek Homosexuality*, elaborates on this idea: "The gymnasium as a whole or the wrestling-school . . . in particular provided opportunities for looking at naked boys, bringing oneself discreetly to a boy's notice in the hope of eventually speaking to him (for the gymnasium functioned as a social centre for males who could afford leisure), and even touching a boy in a suggestive way, as if by accident, while wrestling with him."<sup>7</sup>

It might be argued that Eakins's concerns were fundamentally scientific, that his interest in the mechanics of human motion would logically bring him into those arenas of activity where the body, in its natural state, could be observed in a panoply of poses. Indeed, the men in Eakins's *Wrestlers* display the same sensualized physical proximity as those of Eadweard Muybridge (Edward James Muggeridge, 1830–1904), the eminently heterosexual English-born American<sup>8</sup> whose studies of animal and human locomotion, along with the contemporaneous motion experiments of the French photographic pioneer Etienne-Jules Marey (1830–1904), were the inspiration for many of Eakins's subsequent photographic motion studies. It is likewise true that anything said of Eakins's *Wrestlers* could as well apply to Muybridge's images. (In fact, in 1884 Eakins worked with Muybridge on a study of animal locomotion under the auspices of the University of Pennsylvania.) In both cases, the wrestling images offer male physical intimacy that breaches the usually accepted bounds of propriety. But it is often under the cloak of such rationales that opportunities for otherwise unexpressed desires may find limited satisfaction. It becomes then a question of degree. The homoeroticism of Muybridge's photographs is a consequence of his subject matter; likewise in Eakins. But Eakins's frequent articulation of classical ideals as a basis upon which to certify male nudity or to encourage spiritual man-to-man intimacy, and as the explicit theme of his work in painting and bas-relief, suggests that the photographer himself was expressing a deep personal impulse.



There are other more exceptional instances that support a view of Eakins's perspective as being emotionally and frequently homoerotic—that is, admiring of and drawn to male beauty, prowess, and strength. They are the photographs that were preparatory to his masterful painting *The Swimming Hole* [*Swimming*], and they mix the pastoral sublime of Sutcliffe's *Natives* with the piquant genre aspects of *Water Rats*. Singly and as a group, these photographs encapsulate Eakins's interests in human motion.

The series of pictures, taken about 1883,<sup>9</sup> depicts a group of young men (Eakins's students) diving from a rocky jetty into a country lake. In the best picture of this series—certainly the most famous and the one closest to the subsequent painting—two young men are already in the water, and there seems to be an easy conversational give-and-take between them and the group on land. As much as this photograph is a study of figures in motion, it is also a bucolic evocation of youthful high spirits, of that time in life when the sexual urge lies just beneath the surface of civil propriety. . . . *The Swimming Hole* images . . . are Whitmanesque allusions to manly physical self-possession and suggest an unfocused sexual longing and curiosity, in a sexually segregated environment, that is often the subtext in the drama of sporting activity among young males.

These photographs and the canvas that was to emerge share almost perfectly the homoempathic sensibility that colors *Leaves of Grass*, Walt Whitman's nineteenth-century magnum opus:

Twenty-eight young men bathe by the shore  
Twenty-eight young men and all so friendly;  
Twenty-eight years of womanly life and all so  
    lonesome.  
She owns the fine house by the rise of the bank,  
She hides handsome and richly drest aft the blinds  
    of the window.  
Which of the young men does she like the best?  
    Ah the homeliest of them is beautiful to her.  
Where are you off to, lady? for I see you,  
You splash in the water there, yet stay stock still in  
    your room.  
Dancing and laughing along the beach came the  
    twenty-ninth bather,  
The rest did not see her, but she saw them and  
    loved them.

The beards of the young men glisten'd with wet, it  
     ran from their long hair,  
     Little streams pass'd all over their bodies.  
 An unseen hand also pass'd over their bodies,  
 It descended tremblingly from their temples and  
     ribs.  
 The young men float on their backs, their white  
     bellies bulge to the sun, they do not ask who  
     seizes fast to them,  
 They do not know who puffs and declines with  
     pendant and bending arch,  
 They do not think whom they souse with spray.<sup>10</sup>

Robert K. Martin's interpretation of the above section of "Song of Myself" takes the poet's imagined situation (where we naturally take the observing female's frame of reference in the poem for the poet himself) and draws the following conclusion: "In the dream-vision of Whitman there are no persons, but rather a general feeling of the delight of sexual experience regardless of the partner. . . . The important point to see is that not asking, not knowing and not thinking are Whitman's *democratic* vision, and anonymous sexuality is an important way station on the path to the destruction of distinctions of age, class, beauty *and* sex. Whitman loves all being, and will love, and be loved by, all being. It is perhaps at this juncture that the implications of Whitman's perspective become most revolutionary."<sup>11</sup>

This exaggerates the case in regard to *The Swimming Hole* photographs, which remain, nevertheless, a perfect analogue to the Whitman poem quoted above. There is nonetheless a certain parallel indiscriminate physical interaction among the students that may achieve an amorous, if not genital, dimension. It is also clear that Eakins's own male-directed sensibility focuses on specifically sensual parts of these young men's anatomies—busts, thighs, legs. Eventually, in the painting, the photographic inadvertencies are transformed into a paean to classical male beauty. Indeed, the classical references are unmistakable. As Emmanuel Cooper says, "*The Swimming Hole* evokes the naked athletic comradeship of the Greek gymnasium, but with the additional sense of the relaxed human relationships being continuous with the idyllic natural setting."<sup>12</sup>

Furthermore, in the canvas, the reclining figure on the left approximates the same attitude as that of the *Dying Gaul*, a Roman copy after a bronze original from Pergamum of which there is a cast in the Pennsylvania

Academy.<sup>13</sup> The central figure—anticipated in an Eakins photograph of 1880—strikes a contrapposto that accentuates his finely formed limbs and the roundness of his backside. Further accentuating the classical reference in the painting, the juxtaposition of the figures on the rocks recalls classical pediment sculpture<sup>14</sup> thereby conferring on this central figure a heroic dimension. In both the 1880 photograph and the painting, the figure's backside is also the midpoint focus of the composition—that anus which, Guy Hocquenghem argues, is “essentially private” and “has no social position except sublimation.”<sup>15</sup> Thus, by declaring the ass in all its beauty, Eakins inadvertently (and much to his society's chagrin) “challenges anality-sublimation because [he] restores the desiring use of the anus.”<sup>16</sup> As everyone knows, Hocquenghem assures us (or at least as everyone secretly suspects), “Homosexuality primarily means anal homosexuality, sodomy.”<sup>17</sup>

There is also a voyeuristic quality to the painting's homoeroticism in which we are all, as audience, implicitly enjoined. In *The Great American Nude*, William H. Gerdts points out that the figure in the lower right hand of the painting—the man in the water—is widely believed to be Eakins himself (see also note [9]). Gerdts concludes, “The love of youth expressed, the nobility and detailed muscularity of the figures, the caressing light, all suggest the sexual attraction on the part of that older man introduced into the composition as observer, or voyeur, at right angles to the general axial direction of the triangle of nude figures.”<sup>18</sup>

In both cases, painted and photographic, Eakins manages to capture the essence of classical aesthetics as applied to the male figure. Writing of several other casual plein air photographs of Eakins's students, Gordon Hendricks posits the following: “There was nothing formal about the photographs the artist took of naked horseplay among his male students. . . . They are rather an evidence of the artist's desire to record, *for his own delectation*, what little excitement there was in the Philadelphia version of Greek joy.”<sup>19</sup> In other words, the spirit was willing; Eakins's art could not help but convey homoerotic feelings whose expression could only be acceptably demonstrated in social, as opposed to sexual, situations.

The artist's own remarks provide some confirmation of his homoerotic sensibility. Writing in a letter home about the Beaux-Arts Grecian female nudes that crowded the annual Salon exhibitions in Paris during the years of his Paris study (1866–1870), Eakins derided their phony classicism. He concluded, “I can conceive of few circumstances wherein I would have to make a woman naked but if I did I wouldn't mutilate her for double the money. She is the most beautiful thing there is [in] the world except a naked man.”<sup>20</sup>

In 1886, Eakins was dismissed as director of the Pennsylvania Academy. He had been the school's preeminent teacher. His dismissal from the academy is a story whose main outlines every American art student knows, since it represents the classic tension between artistic freedom and provincial public response. In the women's life class, Eakins lifted the posing strap of a male model in order to explain anatomical structure and function. Some women students lodged a protest; Eakins was fired by the academy's board whose conservative faction had for some time disapproved of some of his teaching methods.<sup>21</sup>

In response, Eakins and his student disciples set up the Philadelphia Art Students League. At about this time, Eakins met a working-class Irish boy of seventeen, Samuel Murray (1869–1941), with whom he maintained a friendship lasting thirty years. Under Eakins's tutelage, according to Gordon Hendricks, Murray became a skilled sculptor “and photographs of him alone and with his work show the openness and innocence that must have delighted his sophisticated, disillusioned master.”<sup>22</sup> They shared a studio in Philadelphia for eleven years.<sup>23</sup>

Hendricks characterizes the relationship between the two as very close. Though unable to claim a sexual aspect to it, he finds it significant that Murray married only several months before Eakins died and neither he nor Eakins had any children.<sup>24</sup> Murray's marriage, to a woman three years his senior, took place after a twenty-year engagement.<sup>25</sup> Eakins and his young pupil, twenty-five years his junior, also took long trips together, “often for a matter of weeks, into the wilderness,” writes Hendricks, who does not find this “close association between two men” unusual for the period, “but such a difference in ages was less typical.”<sup>26</sup>

Lloyd Goodrich, Eakins's premier biographer, raises the issue of homosexuality between the two men only to dismiss it. In his updated life of Eakins from 1982, he explains that he wrote his original biography of the artist in the early 1930s; none of those close to Eakins whom he then interviewed mentioned homosexuality, although they were “entirely frank about sexual matters.”<sup>27</sup> But we should hardly be surprised that Eakins's intimates would neglect to mention an aspect of personality still then so much more taboo than other sexual eccentricities, especially while Eakins's wife, Susan Hannah MacDowell, was yet alive.<sup>28</sup>

Whatever final determination we may choose to make, we need to remember that same-sex intimacy between men, and especially open to women, was characteristic of mid-nineteenth-century life. This was usually encouraged by sex-segregated settings, whether the lonely prairie life of cowboys or the protected space of the all-girls school. As John D'Emilio and

Estelle B. Freedman explain, “romantic friendship coexisted with sexual relationships, overlapping at times. . . . The overlap of the romantic, erotic, and physical has made it difficult to define these relationships. . . . The modern terms *homosexuality* and *heterosexuality* do not apply to an era that had not yet articulated these distinctions.”<sup>29</sup>

So one cannot with certainty characterize as genital Eakins’s relationship with Murray. Still, their union evidences a high degree of paternal affection<sup>30</sup> and, perhaps, subliminally romantic currents. It was not unlike the romantic friendships that the older Walt Whitman established throughout his life with several working-class men, particularly the omnibus driver Peter Doyle.<sup>31</sup> For both Eakins and Whitman, these sharp differences in age and intellectual capacity mirrored the requirements of ancient homosexual courtship where, as Foucault has it, “truth and sex were linked, in the form of pedagogy, by the transmission of a precious knowledge from one body to another.”<sup>32</sup>

The knowledge that both men shared this sensibility toward younger men, and that each in his work channeled his feelings into a grander utopianized vision of male comradeship, helps explain the decided mutuality of warmth and respect the two men had for each other. As we have seen, Eakins’s photographs and some paintings are equivalents of the homoempathic sentiments expressed in Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass*. . . .

Furthermore, that both Whitman and Eakins divined generalized conceptions of the glories of youthful male physicality (separate and apart from their personal attachments to younger men) is the effect of a *modus operandi* that Edgar Z. Friedenberg has termed “subject-homoerotic”: “There is, in a sense, no true external love object—at least initially. Such men love boys as a way of loving the boy in themselves and themselves in the boy. They need have no antipathy for women and may have warm friends among them. . . . The situation may be pictured . . . by thinking of the subject-homoerotic man as . . . if he were caught in the predicament of earliest adolescence and tries to escape from it through his love for the young men he might have become. His intense identification with them may lead to an almost uncanny empathy.”<sup>33</sup> Such an “uncanny empathy” needs no better word than *homoerotic*, if by it we include a powerful intimacy between people of the same gender that does not necessarily culminate in sex.

For Frank M. Sutcliffe and Thomas Eakins, the camera’s descriptive powers were ultimately placed at the service of idealistic and imaginative principles. For both, it was not enough merely to document the young male figure, but to place that figure in an attitude and environment that granted it symbolic value.

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- 1 Aaron Scharf, *Art and Photography* (1968, reprint; Harmondsworth, Baltimore, and Ringwood, Australia: Penguin Books, 1974), p. 130.
  - 2 Peter Gay, *The Bourgeois Experience, Victoria to Freud*, 2 vols. *The Tender Passion* (1986, reprint; New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 2:217.
  - 3 Gay, *The Bourgeois Experience, Victoria to Freud*, 2 vols. *Education of the Senses* (1984, reprint; New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 1:208.
  - 4 Jeffrey Weeks, *Sex, Politics, and Society: The Regulation of Sexuality Since 1800*, 2d ed. (London and New York: Longman, 1989), p. 101.
  - 5 Dr. Ellwood C. Parry III, introduction to exhibition catalogue, *Photographer Thomas Eakins*; catalogue notes by Dr. Robert Stubbs (New York: ACA Galleries, and Philadelphia and Atlanta: Olympia Galleries, 1981), p. 2.
  - 6 Plato, *The Symposium*, trans. by Walter Hamilton (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1951), pp. 51–52.
  - 7 K. J. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), pp. 54–55.
  - 8 A notorious episode in Muybridge's life centered on the killing of his wife's lover, whom he believed had fathered their only son. Muybridge was imprisoned, his wife sued for divorce, but he was ultimately found not guilty by a jury in an American Victorian society that sympathized perfectly with a husband's crime of passion. His wife brought repeated actions against Muybridge for divorce and alimony, but she died before a court decision came down—this just a year after giving birth to the son Muybridge would continue to support into adulthood. See Kevin MacDonnell, *Eadweard Muybridge: The Man Who Invented the Moving Picture* (Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown, 1972), p. 18. For contemporary accounts of Muybridge's trial, MacDonnell includes an appendix, pp. 147–150.
  - 9 See Phyllis D. Rosenzweig, *The Thomas Eakins Collection of the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden* (Washington, D.C.: Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Smithsonian Institution Press, 1977), p. 103: "It is by no means certain that Eakins was the author of these three photographs. . . . It is not surprising to find that many of Eakins' students were adept in photography." Gordon Hendricks proposes that Eakins is the man pulling himself up out of the water on the right in figure 15; see Hendricks, *The Photographs of Thomas Eakins* (New York: Grossman, 1972), p. 201. It is reasonable, however, to continue to view these as works by Eakins in that they provided the basis for the later painting of *The Swimming Hole* and were undoubtedly taken under his general direction.
  - 10 Walt Whitman, *The Complete Poems*, "Song of Myself," from *Leaves of Grass* ("deathbed" edition of 1891–92), lines 199–216 (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1975), p. 73.
  - 11 Robert K. Martin, *The Homosexual Tradition in American Poetry* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979), pp. 19–20, cited by Justin Kaplan, *Walt Whitman: A Life* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1980), p. 91.
  - 12 Emmanuel Cooper, *The Sexual Perspective: Homosexuality and Art in the Last 100 Years in the West* (London and New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986), pp. 33–34.
  - 13 Rosenzweig, *The Thomas Eakins Collection*, p. 101.
  - 14 Ibid.

- 15 Guy Hocquenghem, *Homosexual Desire*, trans. Daniella Dangoor (London: Allison and Busby, 1978), p. 82.
- 16 Ibid., p. 84.
- 17 Ibid.
- 18 William H. Gerdts, *The Great American Nude: A History in Art* (New York and Washington, D.C.: Praeger, 1974), p. 122.
- 19 Hendricks, *The Photographs of Thomas Eakins*, p. 6.
- 20 Lloyd Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins*, 2 vols. (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1982), 1:28.
- 21 There had been prior difficulties between Eakins and the Pennsylvania Academy's board on philosophical grounds and in relation to a salary dispute. It appears that this incident was the straw that broke the camel's back. See Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins*, 1:281-294.
- 22 Hendricks, *The Photographs of Thomas Eakins*, p. 9.
- 23 Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins*, 1:ix.
- 24 Gordon Hendricks, *The Life and Work of Thomas Eakins* (New York: Grossman, 1974), p. 221.
- 25 Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins*, 2:109.
- 26 Hendricks, *The Life and Work of Thomas Eakins*, p. 221.
- 27 Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins*, 2:109.
- 28 Eakins had first been engaged in 1874 to a young woman who would die five years later. When he married Susan Hannah MacDowell in 1884 he was nearly forty. She was seven years his junior and had been a prize-winning student of his at the Pennsylvania Academy. See Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins*, 1:79-81 and 221-223.
- 29 John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (1988, reprint; New York: Perennial Library, Harper and Row, 1989), p. 121.
- 30 Sylvan Schendler describes Murray as a "substitute son." See Schendler, *Eakins* (Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown, 1967), p. xi.
- 31 See Kaplan, *Walt Whitman*, pp. 311-316, for a discussion of the Whitman-Doyle friendship.
- 32 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 2 vols., *An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (1978, reprint; New York: Vintage Books, 1980), 1:61.
- 33 Edgar Z. Friedenberg, *The Vanishing Adolescent* (Boston: 1973), pp. 121-122, cited by Kaplan, *Walt Whitman*, p. 85.

# The Male Body in Another Frame: Thomas Eakins' *The Swimming Hole* as a Homoerotic Image

MICHAEL HATT, 1993

Thomas Eakins's painting *The Swimming Hole* [*Swimming*] presents us with a problematic history. The patron, Edward Coates, the director of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, first demanded changes to the picture (painted on commission in 1884–85), and then, on its completion, rejected it in favour of another canvas by Eakins, *The Pathetic Song*. This latter work, a portrait, was deemed by Coates to be more representative of Eakins's work,<sup>1</sup> although at this stage in his career Eakins was by no means established as a portraitist. *The Swimming Hole* seems to have been ignored for the rest of the artist's lifetime, being exhibited only once, at the Pennsylvania Academy's annual show in 1885, and apparently attracting no critical reaction. The evidence that suggests that the picture may have been controversial coupled with the absence of any documentation is tantalising and frustrating. Art historians have assumed that the painting and its subject strained the limits of acceptability in late 19th-century Philadelphia, and that the use of the male nude in the representation of the homosocial is, at base, what consigned *The Swimming Hole* to a basement for so many years. In exploring the painting, it is this subsequent history—the history of the image in recent cultural and art historical work—with which I want to begin. Not only do I want to deal with the silences of the late 19th-century, but I also want to challenge the views of the image that have become commonplace in recent publications.

Responses to the painting in recent scholarship reiterate the sense of its being problematic. While accounts of the painting place it centrally in Eakins's output, and, indeed, in the canon of 19th-century American painting, art historians have not engaged with the image in the same way that they have with other works by Eakins.<sup>2</sup> . . . For both more traditional art historians interested in authorial intention and social historians of art seeking audience responses, the primary material of letters, contracts, reviews, and reports is missing. Significantly, though, attempts to fill this absence, to speculate or to find alternative methodological approaches that might allow something to be said about the painting, have not been made.

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In addition to the silence that surrounds this specific image, there is another silence to contend with but one, I hope, that may be made to yield a history: the critical silence around Eakins himself in the 1880s and 1890s. Much of the secondary literature on 19th-century American painting offers us an extremely distorted view of the contemporary art world. Whilst art historians have tended to characterise the end of the century in terms of the ascendancy and triumph of realism, represented by the triumvirate of Eakins, Winslow Homer and Albert Pinkham Ryder, of these only Homer received any acclaim at the time.<sup>3</sup> Art history has reinstated Eakins at the pinnacle of 19th-century art, but has overlooked the fact that his contemporaries often viewed his work very differently. In discussing the work Eakins produced at the nadir of his career—the last 15 or 20 years of the century—it is important to remember that the American art world was far more interested in mainstream academic painters such as Gérôme, landscapists like Millet, and sentimental genre painting.<sup>4</sup>

Given these limitations in the literature, what has been said about *The Swimming Hole*? Principally, there are four major kinds of response, but all of them have as an intentional or unintentional focus the issue of male sexuality. The first response, which is the most extreme and the most inaccurate, is that represented by Edward Lucie-Smith who, in his book *The Body: Images of the Nude*, describes the painting as an autobiographical image which, while overdetermined, is the outcome of the matter of Eakins's own suppressed homosexuality.<sup>5</sup> Eakins, for Lucie-Smith, is beyond doubt homosexual, and this image is a manifestation of his desire for other male bodies. There are numerous problems with this suggestion, not least that it pays no attention to the historical viability of our modern notion of "the homosexual."<sup>6</sup> It ignores the enormous difficulties presented by trying to find evidence for this assertion, and seems to rest on the argument that if a male painter chooses to paint the male nude then that choice must be sexually motivated in a completely straightforward manner. The use of the word "suppressed" rather suggests a vulgar Freudianism that fails to take account of the dynamic and economic relations between the systems of the conscious and the unconscious.<sup>7</sup>

In a far more sophisticated argument, Michael Fried also raises the issue of repressed homosexual desire. In his long and brilliant essay on *The Gross Clinic*,<sup>8</sup> Fried only refers to *The Swimming Hole* in a footnote, but it is an instructive aside. The footnote appears in the context of a discussion about Freud's Schreber case study and "the 'paranoiac' scenario based on the homosexual wish-fantasy of being sexually possessed by another man."<sup>9</sup> Casually,

at the margin, Fried adds that “another major painting by Eakins in which homoerotic fantasy would appear to be in play is of course *The Swimming Hole*.”<sup>10</sup> There is an awkward tension between the assertiveness of the statement—“major painting,” “of course”—and Fried’s uncertainty in saying that fantasy “would appear” to be “in play.” Moreover, there is a very telling switch from homosexual to homoerotic. Without explaining the difference between the terms, or why he applies one to Gross and one to the bathers, Fried exacerbates the sense of uncertainty.

In spite of the enormous differences between Lucie-Smith and Fried, both point to the repressed homosexuality of the artist as central to the image and, therefore, suggest that finding a meaning for the painting depends upon tracing the relation between the artist’s sexuality and his work. In the other three responses I want to describe, this notion is not challenged, but is diluted or qualified in various ways.

A number of commentators have presented the image as imbued with a broadly homosexual spirit, particularly by linking it to the poetry of Walt Whitman. William Gerdts offers the clearest exposition of this kind of discussion:

There is . . . something very sexual about this work, as indeed there is about Eakins’s other depictions of male nudity. . . . Such sexuality is lacking in Eakins’s few treatments of the female figure. Whether conscious or not, homosexuality may have contributed to a sympathy with Walt Whitman, whose great portrait Eakins painted, and whose poem “Twenty-eight Young Men Bathe by the Shore” bears literary analogy to Eakins’s *Swimming Hole*.<sup>11</sup>

In effect, this amounts to little more than a more circumspect version of the Lucie-Smith thesis, but bearing an apparent historical credibility through the reference to Whitman. The same poem is cited as an analogue by Evan H. Turner,<sup>12</sup> while Donelson Hoopes merely refers to the painting’s “Whitmanesque abandon.”<sup>13</sup> The painting is also used as the front cover illustration of the Penguin edition of Whitman’s poetry, and one of the associated photographs Eakins made of his students bathing at the site of the painting is used by Guy Hocquenghem to illustrate a discussion of Whitman in a book about homosexuality.<sup>14</sup> It is almost as if Whitman’s homosexuality—and this, of course, is never problematised—can simply be used to bear witness to Eakins’s homosexuality.

Thirdly come a number of writers who write with a more sophisticated model of homosexuality.<sup>15</sup> Emmanuel Cooper, for instance, makes it clear that “none of [Whitman, Eakins, and Tuke] can be seen as homosexual in the modern sense of the word,” although “all expressed at some time powerful homoerotic qualities in their work.”<sup>16</sup> This shift in terminology from homosexual to homoerotic ultimately seems to make little difference. In discussing *The Swimming Hole*, Cooper veers back to the orthodoxy of the examples above. The picture is a “physical and symbolic demonstration of Eakins’s own homoerotic interests” and relates to the themes of Whitman’s *Song of Myself*.<sup>17</sup>

Finally, there are those writers who deny the fact that Eakins was homosexual. It may seem as if their inclusion here is misplaced, but what is particularly interesting about these historians is that they feel the need to reject explicitly a charge of homosexuality without actually citing the accusation they refute. Sexuality continues to be the focus of the image even when it is being disavowed. The spectre of deviance is, it seems, immediately raised by the sight of the male nude in *The Swimming Hole*, and the ensuing anxiety is only too apparent. Consider, for instance, Gordon Hendricks, who also mounts his argument via the photographs:

Some have considered such photographs as evidence that Eakins, if not homosexual or bisexual, was at least homoerotic. But the artist would undoubtedly have done the same thing with his women students if such a thing had been possible.<sup>18</sup>

That’s all right then. Indeed, it’s very revealing that Hendricks is so eager to recuperate Eakins for heterosexuality.<sup>19</sup>

Together, these diverse responses, manoeuvring around the notion of homosexual desire, consolidate the image as problematic. It is addressed as an articulation of desire, with little historical attention paid to the possibility of such a transparent articulation and, more to the point, what it might have meant for a 19th-century American. A reference to Walt Whitman is simply not sufficient as a means of covering this ground, and what are supposed to be historical connections are little more than a veneer on a psychobiography, founded on essentialist notions of gender and sexuality.

Here, I want to do two things in response to this use of the painting. Firstly, I want to challenge the categorisation of the image as homosexual. Indeed, I want to challenge the very ways these suggestions are framed and

ask instead, as Thomas E. Yingling does, "How may homosexuality be organized as a system of inquiry that moves beyond the question of thematics to the problem of representation?"<sup>20</sup>

In order to move beyond thematics, I want to interrogate the image in such a way that we can shake off apparently straightforward speculation about the artist's sexuality. Instead I shall address a series of specific questions: does *The Swimming Hole* express desire? If so, can this desire be described as homosexual? Is such an explanation of the painting compatible with the history of its circumstances of production and its social location? In attempting to pose, if not answer, these questions, I shall begin with the idea of the homoerotic, a term frequently used in relation to the picture. In doing this I shall engage with a second task, which is to ask how the homoerotic might be defined; how it might be used to conduct or to intervene in an analysis of an image, and whether it can be a more useful tool, as a discrete theoretical category, than a model based on a speculative reconstruction of Eakins's unconscious.

### Towards a Definition of Homoeroticism

. . . We need to begin with a definition of the word "erotic." Again, this is a word that seems self-evident, but is in fact far from the straightforward term that its dictionary definition ("pertaining to the passions of love"<sup>21</sup>) suggests: . . . The erotic is a representation of the sexual. When applied to, say, an image, it provides a legitimization of the sexual nature or the sexual content of that image. To deploy the term is to engage in a complex negotiation of the thorny area of representation and sexuality. First of all, "erotic" marks a move away from the corporeal to an ostensibly intellectual or spiritual realm. Without denying the sexual, it predicates the possibility of disembodied desire, a desire that somehow goes beyond mere lust.

"Erotic" therefore represents the body or the sexual as an aesthetic object. Desire is reconstituted as an aesthetic response. The gaze is construed as being concerned not simply with its own desire, but with a disinterested sense of beauty. A particular image of sexuality, then, is validated, or valorised, by its representation as being something which is beyond desire.

Importantly, though, while the "erotic" aestheticises the sexual, desire is not completely effaced or ignored. Aestheticised desire does not seek to deny pleasure, but, instead, makes a division between good and bad pleasure, good and bad desire, good and bad sexuality that supposedly subsists apart from the interests of the individual. This description of the sexual in aesthetic, that is, non-sexual terms provides the obvious point of entry for a deconstruction of this notion of eroticism and its deployment.

This definition of the erotic also works to create a hierarchy of cultural products; for example, a painted nude is erotic, while a Page Three pin-up is merely titillating. The erotic becomes a way of consolidating cultural categories, such as the opposition between the aesthetic and the pornographic. The ways in which eroticism is defined in relation to diverse areas of social practice is also a clue to the question of how these definitions are produced and circulated. . . . [T]he definition of the erotic is not bounded by a fixed meaning that can be found in the dictionary, but is the product of an overdetermined social process.

What, then, of “homoerotic”? At first glance it may seem that it is simply the same strategy applied to a homosocial realm. To call *The Swimming Hole* homoerotic is to permit the possibility it presents of male pleasure in the male body. But there are significant differences which present a particular set of difficulties in using the term and in analysing the kind of rhetoric or image it represents; not least because of the problems created by desire in a homosocial context. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the word as “pertaining to or characterised by a tendency for erotic emotions to be centred on a person of the same sex.”<sup>22</sup> For the OED the term is clearly more complex than “erotic,” and the inclusion of the words “tendency” and “emotions” suggest that the dictionary is keeping something hidden, or is containing a threat. Interestingly, one of the references given in the OED is from Ferenczi’s *Sex in Psychoanalysis* which distinguishes between the homoerotic as psychical and the homosexual as biological; and yet the dictionary tells us that the two terms are also frequently used synonymously. We are thus led to believe that the two words, “homoerotic” and “homosexual,” are both the same and different.

Nonetheless, an analysis of male homoeroticism must begin with male pleasure in a male body. . . . The most immediate difference from the erotic is that such desire is not validated by its description as homoerotic. Instead, it is validated by strategies that actually refute the possibility of such a label; to legitimate this desire, the erotic has to be denied. This distinction is well-illustrated by male and female nudes. While the description of a female nude as erotic is positive and validating, a male nude has to be validated by a description that refutes any eroticism; for a male viewer to find pleasure in a male body, he has to find a response that effaces desire. The homoerotic functions by concealing itself. Our paradigm, for example, lies on the borders of transgressive sexuality, and requires not only an aestheticisation, but also a disavowal of the sexual. . . .

The homoerotic, then, reproduces the erotic inasmuch as it valorises desire, mitigating it by the implicit claim of disinterestedness, but differs from it by actually concealing that desire. It seems to constitute a paradox. This paradox, being central to the issue, is not something to be glossed over, but it has to be separated from a methodological confusion. The argument so far is dealing with two distinct questions: the homoerotic is firstly a rhetorical strategy that effaces the desire that motivates it; but it is also a label the critic or historian might use to name that strategy. It becomes a category that can be imposed on a text or an image to deconstruct it, to reveal the paradox that lies at its centre, thus reinstating desire and reasserting the sexual that is denied.

. . . These issues of pleasure and desire cannot be pursued without approaching the relationship between the homoerotic and the homosexual. As alluded to at the beginning, the homoerotic is often taken to mean erotic within a homosexual context; that is, a homosexual version of the erotic, thus validating certain homosexual desire. . . . There is a need to separate homosexual eroticism and homoeroticism, the erotic in the homosocial, where desire must remain unspoken (or spoken as unspoken), is very different from the eroticisation of the homosexual. The homoerotic is not about the validation of homosexual desire but about the articulation of a desire that cannot be validated.

This distinction is the crux of the matter, particularly for the purposes of historical analysis. The danger exists of confusing a generic and necessary homosexual desire with a specific repressed or unformed desire or pleasure; . . . This desire will certainly bear the traces of sexuality but it may not correspond to a modern notion of homosexuality,

How, then, can we characterise the relationship between the homosexual and the homoerotic? In his book *Homosexual Desire*, Guy Hocquenghem says this:

The exclusively homosexual characterisation of desire in its present form is a fallacy of the imaginary; but homosexuality has a specially manifest imagery, and it is possible to undertake a deconstruction of such images. If the homosexual image contains a complex knot of dread and desire, if the homosexual fantasy is more obscene than any other and at the same time more exciting, if it is impossible to appear anywhere as a self-confessed homosexual without upsetting families, causing children to be dragged out of the way and arousing mixed feelings of horror and desire,

then the reason must be that for us twentieth-century westerners there is a close connection between desire and homosexuality. Homosexuality expresses something—some aspect of desire—which appears nowhere else, and that something is not merely the accomplishment of the sexual act with a person of the same sex.<sup>23</sup>

Homoeroticism is exactly the mechanism by which the licit and the illicit, the sexually acceptable and the obscene are ostensibly kept apart. It is the discourse or strategy that both articulates that aspect of desire and keeps at bay the threat it poses. However, if we use “homoerotic” as a category of historical analysis, a concept that we impose on a history from our own position, it becomes something else, something beyond a frame. . . . Homoeroticism as an historical tool of analysis is such a discourse on the frame, an interpretive category that traces the border that Hocquenghem has helped us to identify.

So, a history of the homoerotic must first pay attention to these two complementary definitions: of homoeroticism in the first sense identified as the frame that separates the homosocial and the homosexual, that is, as a strategy of containment providing a boundary between the two realms; and, in the second sense, the homoerotic as a category of historical analysis, serving as the discourse on the frame, identifying where the frame is and how it operates. So, the homoerotic marks the visible boundary that divides the homosocial and the homosexual; a steel frame that keeps one out and the other in. But, to identify this frame is to draw attention to, not simply the division, but the dangerous closeness of the social to the sexual.<sup>24</sup>

Hocquenghem goes on to call homosexuality “unnameable.”<sup>25</sup> He is wrong at this point. Homosexuality is only too nameable, even though there may be complex questions of power around the naming process and the deployment of that name (as Hocquenghem himself discusses). Instead, it is the homoerotic that cannot be named, not least because of the way it opens up the field of desire and makes the social/sexual division untenable.

. . . The criticism I want to make of those readings of *The Swimming Hole* cited at the beginning of this article . . . is . . . that one finds the diagnosis of the secondary fabrication of the painting to anticipate the apparent truth of Eakins’s homosexuality. What I want to suggest in opposition to this view is. . . not that there is an authentic desire waiting to be unveiled, but that the sense of a boundary between licit and illicit, the frame of regulation, produces the idea of such a naked truth. In other words, I want to reverse the process of unveiling, the process that anticipates a truth, and to try to identify

the process of veiling or containment that produces the very possibility of the naked or true. This should make it clear why it is so important to differentiate between the homosexual and the homoerotic as distinct categories; because, if we do not, then the homoerotic comes to stand for or anticipate the homosexual. Deconstructing the term, then, enables us to conceive the homoerotic as the process of finding a place for certain desires between men, not as an already formed desire looking for an object, but as a desire that emerges from or is actually shaped by a disciplinary frame or method of containment.

### *The Swimming Hole: Homoeroticism and the Male Nude in Late 19th-Century America*

. . . I want to mention some general methodological problems arising when dealing with the male nude. First of all, the history of the male nude itself poses a problem. Its rise and fall, and its eclipse by the ascendancy of the female nude as aesthetic prize par excellence in the 19th century, has yet to be explained sufficiently and, consequently, the status of the male nude is uncertain. Secondly, in art history, the female nude is normally defined in terms of desire (albeit as “erotic” according to the account given above).<sup>26</sup> The insistence on the female nude as the object signifying desire tends to mean that the male nude, in a heterosexual discourse, denies desire; that is, the homoerotic, the placing of limits on the articulation of desire is already in play in art history. . . . Thirdly, there is a tradition of the male nude . . . that . . . inevitably stands in a tradition stretching back to classical antiquity, a tradition that was used or invoked repeatedly, and thus any discussion of desire has to be made in or against the context of a convention.

Outside these problems internal to the history of art are further methodological difficulties specific to the history of late 19th-century America. The male nude cannot stand apart from other ideas about the body in circulation when the work was produced, although it has to be recognised as a discrete category. The changes in definitions of normative masculinity, in particular the growing insistence on the body as a physical embodiment of masculine virtue in the last quarter of the century, the conflation of muscles, manners and morals, must be understood as having some bearing on art or representation in a more general sense. Both subject and style are pertinent and raise complex questions of how the body and its representation are related. At what level are links forged? How far can one go in reading social ideas in the image and the art history in which it is located?

There is of course a concrete point of contact between the two histories which is the social history of the nude in 19th-century America. The



reception of the nude, and the protocols regarding viewing and use, were different from Europe, principally in the greater prudishness of the American public and art world. From the 1830s, when Horatio Greenough's sculpture of nude cherubs cause a scandal, through the grudging acceptance of Hiram Powers's ideal female nude in marble, *The Greek Slave*, to Eakins's own problems concerning the difficulty of using the nude both in teaching at the Pennsylvania Academy (particularly shocking in female art classes), and in his painting, the nude never had the legitimacy in America that it had in, say, the Paris Salon. Moreover, its use became restricted to certain forms of production. While idealised sculpture could present the nude (as a classically validated object), realist painting could not; . . . In 19th-century America, then, more so than in Europe, the nude was already a threat, already on the borders of the obscene, and articulated as such. It could not be recuperated by the idea of the erotic (as in, for example, the valorisation of desire as happens in European Orientalist painting), and more often gained ground by the appeal to antiquity and, therefore, the purity of the ideal and its ostensibly disinterested aesthetic gaze.

The issue, then, is not only a question of the subject of the painting, but of the body and its representation. But to suggest that a simple proscription of the male nude was in force would be both historically inaccurate and theoretically untenable; it would not only deny that the male nude was represented in America in the 1880s and 1890s, but would also understand subject as prior to style rather than in a dialectical relation. Instead, the suggestion that style is a principal parameter for the categorisation of the nude into acceptable and unacceptable should alert us to exactly how unstable a category "the nude" is. We have to contend with not only the differences of male and female, and of the different bodies that are consolidated by style, such as the body of neoclassical sculpture, but also with the different ways of reading the nude engendered by institutional contexts, and the criteria for licitness or illicitness that arise from the conjunction or disjunction of subject, style and audience. All these divisions make the nude a field of difference rather than the solid, unimpeachable category of the connoisseur.

Furthermore, to destabilise the nude in this way makes it clear how easy it would be to overemphasise opposition to the nude in 19th-century America. Nudes certainly did shock—and Eakins is an obvious reference here—but disapproval depended on what nude was placed in what context. . . . The kind of hostile response to Eakins's *Agnew Clinic*, for instance, which deplored the medical setting, the sense of violation to the body, and the unsuitability of the painting as an object for women to look at, was very

different to arguments against Greenough's *Washington*, which focused on the unsuitability of the pose, the classical costume, and the absence of historical reference in a world depicting the pivotal figure of American history. The problem of the male nude in *The Swimming Hole*, therefore, is sure to be more complex than a straightforward and unproblematic hostility to a generic nudity. Moreover, while many nudes, male and female, were deplored, others were actively promoted. In the same show at the Pennsylvania Academy in which Eakins's canvas was hung in 1885, a plaster model of Rodin's allegorical male nude, *The Age of Bronze*, was presented and acclaimed.

So what exactly is the problem here? I want to argue that Eakins's attempts to contain desire, the strategies he adopted to legitimise his use of the nude, were, for his contemporaries, invalid . . . *The Swimming Hole* resists discursive rationalisation, acceptable modes of spectatorship, aestheticisation, and reading in terms of power.

Eakins's work can be understood as participating in a redefinition of masculinity, not least in his portrayal of homosocial spaces—the boxing ring, the gymnasium, the clinic, the rowing club—the kinds of site where a new physical ideal of masculinity was constructed. This new ideal was essentially a paradigm whereby gender was understood to be literally embodied. Eakins's subjects tend to accord with those disciplines such as sport, war and scouting which regulated the body and the moral values it incorporated, disciplines which work against the threat of the unmasculine, the feminine, the sissy, and so on. *The Swimming Hole* presents a problem in this respect, though. One of Eakins's quirks was a wholehearted belief in naturism, in the beneficial effects of naked activity in the open air. With his male students from the Academy, he would go off for naked romps in the woods outside Philadelphia and, of course, *The Swimming Hole* is based on a series of photographs Eakins made during these jamborees. While the idea of fresh air, physical exercise and the casting off of over-genteel civilisation were all acceptable to contemporary attitudes to male behaviour, Eakins's parties were disapproved of. The problem was that outside a discipline, outside a regulated space where the male body was a legitimate spectacle and where looking was controlled, the possibility of unregulated pleasure arose; that is, the homosocial was threatened with the explicit articulation of desire. Why did these young men remove their clothes, bathe together, wrestle and generally fool around? It may have been something to do with health and exercise, but, if so, why were they not at a gymnasium, at a YMCA or in a sports club? These institutions had, after all, been set up to some extent to prevent actions such as these, and to provide a proper, moral, disciplined framework for such activity.

But if evidence of such a social framework was absent, what of aesthetic traditions surrounding the nude? It is at this juncture that a discussion of style becomes crucial. Almost all discussion around the style of the painting seems to centre on the notion of realism and Eakins' use of photography. The series of photographs taken at the site of *The Swimming Hole* are interpreted as preparatory studies, mechanical reproduction in the service of art. Two points have to be made immediately about the photographs. Firstly, they are all too often invoked as part of an argument which defines realism as a transparent process, one which simply transfers a real event onto canvas. . . . This, of course, fails to address both the question of photography as production and of the sense of realist painting as no less stylistically constructed than any other kind of image. Secondly, the photographs have an uncertain status as evidence. Few of Eakins's contemporaries would have seen them, so their usefulness in an historical reading of the reception of the painting may be limited to the point of irrelevance.

Where the photographs *do* help us, though—at least within the methodological framework I have established here—is in tracing the process of re-forming the body as nude in Eakins's practice; that, is, the process of containing the body and, ultimately, of engaging the homoerotic. A comparison of the photographs and the painting are a further illustration too of the need to subdivide the category of the male nude. The photographic nudes are further formalised and idealised in the painting. Bodies are turned to remove the penis from sight, poses are stabilised, and models from the lexicon of the academy are invoked—the clearest example is the figure lying on the rock, based on the famous antique statue of *The Dying Gaul*.

The intervention of academicism between the two regimes of representation, photography and painting, raises the awkward question of the extent to which Eakins and *The Swimming Hole* can or should be described as realist. The problem is that in the canons of art history, styles have been consolidated as self-sufficient terms, whereas, in 19th-century America, "realism" was more a comparative term. Often, art was categorised not according to notions of style, but generically.

The division between landscape and figure painting, for example, was a more obvious one than that between, say, realism and romanticism. More importantly, realism was most frequently deployed in a philosophical, or to be more precise, pseudo-philosophical sense, as the antithesis of idealism. In this definition, realism is less a style and more a precise of artistic production. I do not raise this issue in order to undermine all notion of style, or to suggest that style was not understood as a taxonomic principle in

19th-century America, but, firstly, to point up the historical specificity of these terms,<sup>27</sup> and, secondly, to reconsider the relation between style and the body.

Rather than thinking of this relation in terms of style as something imposed on the body, that is, as if an unproblematic given is represented according to specific stylistic criteria, we need to attend to the ways in which different styles produce different bodies, different nudes. This should make us rethink the importance of style in relation to *The Swimming Hole* as more than a simple formula of realism plus the nude equals unacceptable. Instead, we need to try to understand how Eakins's style failed to complete the nude, failed to fill the absences that would have been all too apparent to contemporary critics: an absence of a moral content to the nude; an absence of allegorical or analogical levels in the picture; an absence of a narrative justification for the body. The nude as genre fails to compensate for the absence of the disciplinary framing.

Indeed, the issue largely depends on the very definition of the nude and the corresponding notion of the limits of decency of the unclothed body. Too many accounts of nudes have been confounded by a reliance on Kenneth Clark's distinction between naked and nude,<sup>28</sup> which, while an important difference, fails to take into consideration how that difference is made. Clark's book stabilises the fluid category of the nude, and my argument here is that in 19th-century America the artistic styles in which the nude is permissible are those which, in the same way, stabilise the nude and allow "nude" to function as a pure, undifferentiated sign.<sup>29</sup>

This is often, crucially, a question of tradition, of the aetiology of the nude. In ideal sculpture, the nude is, of course, legitimised by a centuries-old tradition, by the classical paradigm, and so a statue by Harriet Hosmer or William Wetmore Story is not merely permissible, but actually desirable;<sup>30</sup> . . .

. . . The process of sculpture, of the transformation of flesh into plaster, marble or bronze, is a process of repetition; the repetition of the erasing of the model's body from the tradition of the nude.

. . . Again the flesh is displaced, and touch is denied, as is, indeed, the radical connection between touching and looking.

A number of factors, then, to which we might add the materials of sculpture, and anatomical schematisation . . . combine to render the sculpted body a sign that effaces its referent; and this is true of both male and female nudes. Idealisation was largely a process of imposing a system of proportion (such as the one Story himself formulated, in emulation of conjectured Greek treatises<sup>31</sup>), of muscular formations, and of physical completeness on the model. It is exactly such a metamorphosis of anatomy through the medium of

taste that allows neoclassical sculpture in 19th-century America to stabilise the nude, and make it useable.

Realist painting, as Eakins practised it, on the other hand, works in exactly the opposite direction. Compare Hosmer and Story with this quotation from Eakin[sic]:

I don't like the long study of casts, even of the sculptors of the best Greek period. At best they are only imitations, and an imitation of imitations cannot have so much life as an imitation of nature itself. The Greeks did not study the antique: the *Theseus* and *Illysius* and the draped figures in the Parthenon pediment were modeled from life, undoubtedly.<sup>32</sup>

The emphasis here is very much on flesh, on the primacy of the body even in the classical tradition. . . .

Moreover, Eakins insisted on the impossibility of disconnecting touching and looking, which would have been both theoretically and practically unacceptable to much of the late 19th-century art world:

Feel the model. A sculptor when he is finishing has his hand almost continually on the model.<sup>33</sup>

Such attitudes, and their stylistic consequences, immediately destabilise the nude as defined by Story and Hosmer. While ideal sculpture demonstrates that style can purify the body by its treatment of the physical and by the motivation it offers the gaze in terms of a specific moralising narrative or of a generic appeal to tradition, realism does neither. Eakins's approach to the body, then, is sufficiently different from that of many of his contemporaries to mark him out aesthetically, stylistically, and morally. So what exactly is the "realism" of the style of *The Swimming Hole*? What does it mean? And how is it constitutive or symptomatic of the distinctions between the homoerotic, the homosocial and the homosexual?

Firstly, let's return to the photographs that Eakins made of his students bathing at the site of the swimming hole. As I have already pointed out, these photographs are frequently offered as some kind of concrete evidence of Eakins's realism here; after all, is the "real" event that the painting describes, an event, moreover, that is empirically proven by the testimony of the objective camera. This is, of course, an untenable position: . . . it conflates an

apparently unmediated view of reality with photographic and painted representations of the world; it pays no attention to the diversity of definitions of realism; it gives the photographs undue importance as evidence; and, perhaps most problematic of all, it fails to understand realism as a style or set of aesthetic conventions. To counter this omission, and to try to tease out some of the connections between style and the homoerotic, we need to look at the painting in a very specific way. Clearly, the photograph and its revision on the canvas offer an image of unacceptable behaviour. As the examination of the nude has shown, art could render the unacceptable acceptable for the contemporary audience, but Eakins's art fails to fulfill this function. There must, then, be something particular about the painting that was unpalatable to Eakins's contemporaries, that goes beyond the issue of what is represented.

Before leaving subject matter behind altogether, though, what kind of location might we find for this painting in traditions? More than anything, in terms of 19th-century categorisations, *The Swimming Hole* is a kind of genre painting. The history of art is littered with bathing beauties of one sort or another, and while most of these might be female, there are important exceptions such as the Michelangelo *Battle of Cascina* cartoon, or John Singer Sargent's successful canvas *Boys Bathing*. Moreover, in America at this time, the subject of boys at a swimming hole was a popular subject that formed an important part of the myth of the barefoot boy, the picturesque and innocent rural child.<sup>34</sup> As I hope I have already demonstrated, the distance of Eakins's picture from both these precedents made it potentially transgressive; it was too "realist" to conform to Michelangelesque high art, and too unsettling in terms of its content to be just another outdoor life painting. More important than the specific history of these images, however, is the general mode of signification of genre painting. To raise the trivial to the level of art is to suggest that the image represents something beyond its ostensibly banal content. For the art audience of late 19th-century America this did not necessarily mean that every genre painting was imbued with an allegorical meaning, but that such work at least confirmed a view of the world that was true to the bourgeois, Christian, sentimental and nationalistic ideals of America. While a picture of boys bathing might be less than profound, it endorsed the notion that America was untainted, innocent, that there was a place for everything and everything was in its place. Eakins's painting not only fails to do this, but rather offers an alternative: it draws attention to the disjunction of scene and participants, and describes the relocation of mature male homosociality in the unregulated and unspecific landscape. *The Swimming Hole*, then, resists discursive rationalisation. It cannot be explained in terms of either an

assumed real event, or in terms of generic protocols. Rather than confirming social order, it shows the displacement of the social framework.

There is also more to be said about the realist nude here. We seem to be at a point where Eakins's nudes are somewhat paradoxical; on the one hand, I described them as subject to some of the conventions of academicism—the removal of the penis from sight, the reference to *The Dying Gaul*—and yet, on the other, Eakins seems to have challenged attitudes to the nude. The point is that in spite of the academic gestures, the description of the flesh in *The Swimming Hole* is such that the body appears as unstable. The poses are formal, but are arranged in a string almost like a photograph by Muybridge. Indeed, that comparison is quite telling; Eakins worked with Muybridge, and made photographs himself which detailed movement, showing the various positions of the body in motion in a single image.<sup>35</sup> This kind of presentation undercuts the formality of the pose. While the academic nude captures the perfect moment, a gesture which receives its significance from having been frozen, Eakins's suggestion of the transitory nature of the pose, not to mention its instrumentality—that is, pose as always a functional part of a movement—disturbs this orthodoxy.

There is another sense in which Eakins's interest in motility unsettles the tradition of the nude. The nude body here is insufficiently schematised, and presents instead a shifting surface. These nudes are not contained by regular surfaces but are made up of areas of tension and relaxation, of hardness and softness, of muscle and flesh that signify contingency, beyond the safety of the classical pose. Moreover, through their poses, the way that light emphasises specific areas such as the buttocks, and specific movements, and the mobile finish, these nudes represent in too straightforward a way the injunction to feel the model. This is particularly evident in the standing figure whose buttocks are presented to the viewer as the very fulcrum of the painting. The formality of the composition, of any of the poses, actually draws attention to the tactility and fluidity of Eakins's technique, and so both confirm the materiality of the body and the strategies of art to contain the corporeal. What I am suggesting is that these nudes make the operation of the homoerotic too clear.

While it may seem that to read the instruction "Feel the model" into this painting is methodologically unsound, the economy of gazes in and around the painting appears to support such an analysis. Within the frame of the painting the visual economy does not seem to relate to any established economy of power. There is no hierarchy to determine who can look at whom and with what authority. Instead, looks can be exchanged freely, and no

single gaze need defer to any other. It is as if the relations between men, which so often depend upon a strict codification of visual exchange, are opened up to the scrutiny of a gaze that is casual and desiring. This is not to say that desire can be specifically located or identified in the picture, but that it exists as a field of possibilities; looking is determined by wish rather than any more overtly functional structure. There is no obvious answer here to the question of why a man would look at another naked man. Eakins's inclusion of himself, as the figure in the bottom right of the canvas, underlines this uncertainty. Swimming towards the men on the shore, his gaze is the one that is directed; artist and viewer, he simply looks, and in doing so problematises the homosocial gaze. The arrangement of the bodies emphasises that they are there to be looked at. The poses emphasise display, variety, motion, and invite pleasure more than anything else.

Outside the picture, the viewer bears the consequences of this problematisation. The male viewer is in a difficult position here. The implications of an unregulated visual economy structured by desire make us only too aware of the ways in which homosocial looking is normally controlled. That is, the body, uncontained by style or by protocols of looking, performs the function of the "discourse on the frame": in offering no functional reason for spectatorship, and thus making the viewer aware of its difference from other representations, it declares the operation of the homoerotic.

In Europe, the presence of vestiges of academicism may have sufficed as a strategy of containment, the classical allusion and academic composition mitigating the threat of unregulated pleasure. The image in Europe may well have been homoerotic, using an index of propriety (in this case, artistic tradition) to mitigate the intrusion of desire into the homosocial. . . . In European academicism, the non-functional gaze upon the male body is more easily assimilated as a conventional element in the construction of the image and is granted an aesthetic function in the appeal to the nude as the basic motif of academic painting. In America, though, the nude is too unstable a category. It is still contested within debates about aesthetics. Permissible in sculpture and classicising discourses, within certain conditions, realism, understood as transparent representation, cannot use it. Eakins's strategy of containment is disallowed.

Whether or not Eakins represents his own desire here, consciously or unconsciously, as debates around the picture have assumed or tried to ascertain, is not really the point. The painting remained for its audience one which made too clear the function of the homoerotic. *The Swimming Hole*



described too clearly the border between the licit and the illicit, between beauty and obscenity. It moves from the first definition of homoerotic, as controlling desire in order to maintain a separation of homosocial and homosexual, to the second, a discourse on the first. In this it proves to be transgressive. The gaze it invites—the male gaze on the male body—is offered no context for enjoyment other than delight in the body itself. The male nude is insufficient as a frame if there is no legitimate reason for nudity.

The point is this: the homoerotic is acceptable—indeed, necessary—but to name it is not. *The Swimming Hole* effectively deconstructs the category, and locates its own position as/at the frame. These men have frames we catch ourselves looking at. They may be as steel; they are flushed with health; their eyes could conceivably be shining with fiery desire. But these frames have no frame of their own, no war or standardised exercise. The style insistently draws the viewer beyond the aesthetic; there is no system of power to accommodate the gaze; and the spectator is interpolated as both masculine and desiring. The image presents the undisciplined male body as the object of a desiring subject. . . .

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- 1 Letter from Edward Coates to Eakins dated 27 November 1885, quoted in Kathleen A. Foster and Cheryl Leibold, *Writing About Eakins: The Manuscripts in Charles Bregler's Thomas Eakins Collection*, Philadelphia, 1989, p. 172.
  - 2 Compare, for example, the huge bibliography on Eakins's first major painting, *The Gross Clinic*. See Michael Fried, *Realism, Writing, Disfiguration: On Thomas Eakins and Stephen Crane*, Chicago and London, 1987, pp. 163–64.
  - 3 For this kind of view see, for example, Barbara Novak, *American Painting of the Nineteenth Century: Realism, Idealism and the American Experience*, second ed., New York and London, 1979, and John Wilmerding, *American Art*, Harmondsworth, 1976.
  - 4 On the vogue for French academic art and the importance of the Parisian art world to American painting see H. Barbara Weinberg, *The Lure of Paris: Nineteenth-Century American Painters and Their French Teachers*, New York and London, 1991; Lois Marie Fink, *American Art at the Nineteenth-Century Paris Salons*, Washington, D.C., and Cambridge, 1990; and Annette Blaugrund et al, *Paris 1889: American Artists at the Universal Exposition*, New York, 1989. For the American penchant for Millet and mid-century French landscape, see Peter Bermingham, *American Art in the Barbizon Mood*, Washington, D. C., 1975.
  - 5 Edward Lucie-Smith, *The Body: Images of the Nude*, London, 1981, p. 26.

- 6 There is a huge amount of literature on the historical validity of the term and the debate between "essentialism" and "social constructionism." For a useful collection on this question see Edward Stein, ed., *Forms of Desire: Sexual Orientation and the Social Constructionist Controversy*, New York, 1990.
- 7 Sigmund Freud, *The Unconscious*, *Pelican Freud Library*, vol. 11, Harmondsworth, 1984, pp. 167–210.
- 8 Michael Fried, *Realism, Writing, Disfiguration: On Thomas Eakins and Stephen Crane*, Chicago and London, 1987, pp. 1–89.
- 9 *Ibid.*, p. 68.
- 10 *Ibid.*, p. 172, n. 59.
- 11 William H. Gerdts, *The Great American Nude: A History in Art*, New York, 1974, pp. 122–23.
- 12 Evan H. Turner, "Introduction," in Theodor Siegl, ed., *The Thomas Eakins Collection*, Philadelphia, 1978, pp. 25–26.
- 13 Donelson Hoopes, *Eakins Watercolors*, New York, 1971, p. 18.
- 14 Guy Hocquenghem, *Race d'Esp: un siècle d'images de l'homosexualité*, Paris, 1979, p. 89.
- 15 By including Hocquenghem above, I do not wish to imply that he works with an unsophisticated model of homosexuality; this is, perhaps, the last criticism one could make of his work. The point is, rather, that his use of the photograph by Eakins represents a rather naive approach to the visual image.
- 16 Emmanuel Cooper, *The Sexual Perspective: Homosexuality and Art in the Last 100 Years in the West*, London, 1986, p. 25.
- 17 *Ibid.*, pp. 33–34.
- 18 Gordon Hendricks, *The Life and Works of Thomas Eakins*, New York, 1974, p. 160.
- 19 Both Hendricks and Lloyd Goodrich are also very revealing in their discussions of Eakins's relationship with his student Samuel Murray. Again, both cannot not mention the possibility of homosexuality, but both finish by concluding that the relationship was, in Hendricks's words, "simply a father-and-son association" (p. 221). For Goodrich on this see his magisterial monograph, *Thomas Eakins*, 2 vols. Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1982, vol. 2, pp. 190–210.
- 20 Thomas E. Yingling, *Hart Crane and the Homosexual Text*, Chicago and London, 1900, pp. 24–25.
- 21 *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd edition, vol. V, Oxford, 1989, p. 374.
- 22 *Oxford English Dictionary*, vol. VII, p. 339.

- 23 Guy Hocquenghem, *Homosexual Desire*, trans. Daniella Dangoor, London, 1978, p. 36.
- 24 I do not mean to imply here that the sexual is entirely separable from the social, but to mark out licit and illicit male bonds in terms of what the homoerotic makes acceptable—that is, the licit is seen as social and therefore non-sexual; anything sexual is, in commonsense terms, by definition, anti-social.
- 25 Hocquenghem, op. cit., p. 39.
- 26 On the female nude and its relation to ideas of the erotic and the sexual see Lynda Nead, *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality*, London and New York, 1992.
- 27 For instance, W. J. Stillman describes Millet as an idealist and Meissonier a realist, labels which in many respects go against the grain of modern art historical taxonomy; see “The Decay of Art” in *The Old Rome and The New*, London, 1897, p. 182.
- 28 Kenneth Clark, *The Nude*, London, 1956, pp. 1–26. Even more radical voices seem to have accepted Clark’s thesis; e.g., John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, London and Harmondsworth, 1972. For a more subtle response, see Nead, op. cit., pp. 12–16.
- 29 Cf. Clark, op. cit., p. 9. According to Clark, the medieval artist Villard de Honnecourt fails to draw the nude; instead the result is “painfully ugly”: “The Gothic artists could draw animals because this involved no intervening abstraction. But they could not draw the nude because it was an idea; an idea which their philosophy of form could not assimilate.” Clark defines the nude as a specific unified type, where style dictates whether a figure is nude or not.
- 30 It could be argued that to use neoclassical idealized sculpture as an example is historically inappropriate. By the 1880s, sculptors such as Saint Gaudens, Ward and French were far more in the public eye. Nevertheless, neoclassical sculpture was still being produced, was being bought up by American museums—particularly the recently founded Metropolitan Museum in New York—and the idealizing philosophy of art it represented was still a highly articulated trope in the discourse of art. So, although it was in some respects old fashioned, its aesthetic force was still evident, and, as the paradigmatic instance of the stabilization of the nude, the example of neoclassicism clarifies the argument.
- 31 William Wetmore Story, *The Proportions of the Human Figure, according to a new canon of Polycletus, and of the principal ancient and modern systems*, London, 1864.
- 32 From W. C. Brownell, “The Art Schools of Philadelphia,” *Scribner’s Monthly Illustrated*, 1879, quoted in John W. McCoubrey, ed., *American Art 1700–1960*, Englewood Cliffs, 1965, p. 152.
- 33 Brownell, op. cit., quoted in Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins*, vol. I, p. 185.
- 34 Sarah Burns, “Barefoot Boys and Other Country Children: Sentiment and Ideology in Nineteenth-Century American art,” *American Art Journal*, vol. 20 no. 1, 1988, pp. 24–50.
- 35 See Gordon Hendricks, *The Photographs of Thomas Eakins*, New York, 1972.

# Negotiating Victorian Manhood: Thomas Eakins and the Rowing Works

MARTIN A. BERGER, 1994

Twentieth-century scholars of Thomas Eakins have long been drawn to issues of masculinity in both his life and art. Noting the mimetic realism and “manly” subject matter of his paintings, as well as Eakins’s own athleticism, many contemporary critics have taken his works as the very essence of manhood. For modern viewers Eakins’s vigorous images of surgeons and boxers, scientists and rowers, like the canvases of his contemporary Winslow Homer, embody the heroic masculine ideals of the late nineteenth century (Goodrich, 1982; Hendricks, 1974).

Through an examination of a selection of Eakins’s rowing paintings I propose that modern interpretations of the artist’s masculinity have as much to do with twentieth-century standards of manhood as with the masculine paradigms of the 1870s. Drawing on the visual evidence of the works, as well as on period rowing manuals, self-help books, athletic guides, journals and newspapers, I will explore the criteria by which these works were masculine in their day and suggest how they compensated for a “crisis” which I detect in Eakins’s own manhood. Turning, then, to Eakins’s contemporaries I consider the ways in which the rowing paintings, and rowing itself, may have offered Victorian men metaphoric strategies for dealing with the apparently irreconcilable tenets of nineteenth-century male sexuality.<sup>1</sup>

Not only in the twentieth century, but from the outset of Eakins’s career in the early 1870s critics discussed masculine themes in the artist’s work (Schendler, 1967, p. 56; Water-Color, 1875, p. 120). Given the suggestion by modern-day scholars that gender issues take on increased urgency in societies experiencing social unrest, the period critics’ attention to masculinity hardly seems surprising. As Carroll Smith-Rosenberg has proposed, people feeling powerless in the face of sweeping social changes “seek through imagery and myth to mitigate their feelings of helplessness by deflecting and partially distorting change and thus bringing it within control of the imagination.” Unable to contain or reverse unsettling social conditions, individuals turn inward, reshaping familial and sexual relations over which they retain some control (Smith-Rosenberg, 1985, p. 90). In the aftermath of the Civil War questions of sexual identity gained ascendancy as American men

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wrestled with the nation's unravelling social fabric. Reeling under the impact of altered industrial and political orders and concerned by the new roles established by women and African Americans, northeastern white males struggled to define themselves against the new realities of their world.

Buffeted by national, social anxieties, it seems plausible that Eakins's masculine position was further destabilized by a series of personal failings. Without retreating to a definition of masculinity that relies on a normative sex-role it is fair to say that in the early 1870s, when Eakins painted the rowing series, he boasted few of the career benchmarks that the period's middle class took as outward signs of manhood. Having bought his way out of Civil War service, unmarried, unable to earn a living, working in a profession that has long held effeminate associations while he lived and painted in his parents' home, Eakins had failed to achieve a number of important "milestones" of American manhood (Kett, 1977, pp. 31, 144; Rotundo, 1983, pp. 4, 28; Rotundo, 1993, pp. 167-169, 178-193; Schor, 1987, pp. 4, 42-47).

Of all of these failings it was certainly Eakins's inability to support himself that would have proved most problematic for both the artist and his contemporaries. In his survey of masculinity, *American Manhood* (1993), E. Anthony Rotundo demonstrates the evolving (and varying) nature of masculinity in Victorian America. But despite his nuanced picture Rotundo understands that there were certain parameters of nineteenth-century manhood that came increasingly to constrict all men. Whereas men of the eighteenth century drew their identity from their families and their positions in the community as well as from their own achievements, men of the next century took their social identity largely from their success or failure at work. "Work," writes Rotundo, "lay at the heart of a man's role; if work was a problem, so was manhood," for manhood was "defined by notions of success at work" (pp. 191, 178).

There is no doubt that Eakins was long troubled by his inability to earn a livelihood. The artist's earliest surviving correspondence articulates the anxieties he felt in being maintained by his parents. His letters home from France, where Eakins completed his artistic training, offer painfully detailed accounts of all his expenditures and speak pointedly of his desire for self-sufficiency. One letter of 1867 recounts what the artist calls his "humiliation" in requiring his father's continued financial support (Foster & Leibold, 1989, pp. 45, 128; Goodrich, 1982, p. 36). After nearly four years of artistic training at the *Ecole des Beaux Arts* in Paris, Eakins returned to his parents' house in Philadelphia where he set up a studio and painted images of family and friends. Selling only a handful of canvases during the 1870s and

increasingly scorned by critics towards the middle of the decade, Eakins might well have desired a symbolic means of sustaining his faltering manhood. In his portrayals of rowers I believe that we can find unconscious strategies by which the artist sought to reframe his masculine position. By linking himself in his works to uncontestedly masculine professions and by appropriating the male symbols of industrial production Eakins attempted to recast his masculinity. If his paintings were manly by nineteenth-century standards I want to suggest that this is precisely because his masculinity was so troubled.

Early in 1871 Eakins produced his first and perhaps most celebrated rowing painting, *Max Schmitt in a Single Scull*, known originally as *The Champion Single Sculls*. Schmitt, a lawyer by profession and an amateur rower, was for a number of years Philadelphia's single-scutt champion. The work deals with themes that were familiar to Eakins from childhood, when he and his sisters rowed on the Schuylkill River. The canvas is dotted with a number of single sculls, a heavy double-scutt, a train and several structures, with three main boats forming a triangle in the center of the canvas. In the foreground sits the scene's protagonist, Max Schmitt, who, allowing his oars to drag in the water, glides slowly to the left of the viewer. Just behind Schmitt, in the middle distance, a single scut is vigorously propelled towards the background. And running parallel to the railroad bridges in the distance a red boat is rowed by two men, with a third man sitting idly in the boat's stern.

The two scullers closest to the foreground are each lightly attired in white short-sleeved shirts and dark pants, while the men in the distant red boat wear long-sleeved tops, with one sporting a tri-cornered hat. Although the scullers in the foreground wear contemporary clothing, the red boat's rowers are in Quaker dress. To Eakins's contemporaries such a costume would have been read as old-fashioned, even anachronistic, but would, nonetheless, have been instantly recognizable (Trollope, 1968, p. 151). Developed from the heavy workboats used to haul passengers and cargo across rivers, the Quaker's cumbersome craft was the prototype from which modern sculls evolved, and was by the 1870s as anachronistic as its rowers' dress. With their roots in rowing's utilitarian past the heavy boat and crew provide an interesting foil to Schmitt's recreational rowing and light racing scut (Johns, 1983, pp. 20, 39). The imaginary line joining the Quakers and Schmitt hints at the history of American rowing, from its utilitarian beginnings as a means of transportation practiced by wage earners to a pastime for those with the leisure time to partake.

But the third rower in our triangle may also be pulled into the equation. Dressed in a fashion similar to Schmitt's and also occupying a single scull, he nonetheless pulls vigorously like the rowers in the distant red boat. This recreational rower works hard like the Quakers, perhaps training in the hopes of emulating the success that the amateur Schmitt has achieved. That imaginary line from the Quakers to Schmitt also points to an evolution from a community where individuals, supervised by elders, work in conjunction with one another for the common good of the majority, to a society where men strike out on their own for personal fulfillment and individual gain. Supervised by another, the Quaker rowers pull together towards the middle of the river, while Schmitt seems to glide along his course independently of outside guidance. Formally distinct, and yet joined both to Schmitt and the Quakers, the middle sculler becomes a sort of liminal figure, metaphorically bridging the gap between older and newer systems of work and success.

That middle sculler is actually Eakins. Under his tiny self-portrait Eakins printed his surname and the year of the painting in neat red letters along the stern of his scull. As the artist's only signature on the canvas, the inscription, of course, signals his authorship of the work at the same time that it indicates his pictorial presence on the canvas. But by signing the canvas on his scull Eakins, in effect, names his craft in much the same way that Schmitt's scull is inscribed on its port side with its name, "Josie." In the nineteenth century nearly every rower, amateur and professional, named his scull. Some were named "Phantom" or "Argonauta," others were christened after famous political leaders such as, "Washington" or "Jefferson," while still others were named in homage to their makers. The Biglin brothers, for example, the rowers Eakins most often depicted, named one of their sculls "Judge Elliot" after the boatbuilder who designed and built that craft. By naming his boat after himself Eakins, in effect, likens his creation of the two-dimensional scull to the boatbuilder's craft.

Such an association has telling implications, given the development of boatbuilding during the 1860s and 1870s. These decades heralded technological advances afforded by iron outriggers, sliding seats, and paper hulls. Successful boatbuilders were no longer slavish copyists, constructing tried designs, but rather scientists and even artists. Robert Johnson's *History of Rowing* (1871) echoed the sentiment of scullers and sculling enthusiasts by noting that modern boatbuilders require "high mathematical knowledge and rare mechanical skill" (p. 250). Another writer, reporting for the "Aquatics" column in the *National Police Gazette* (1867a), pointed to a boatbuilder's "artistic skill," which he saw as a talented blend of "mathematical accuracy"

and “scientific nicety.” The reporter went on to note “that in races of any magnitude [the boatbuilders] come in for a great share of attention” (p. 3). So important were the builders that newspaper and journal reports on rowing regattas rarely neglected to name the boats’ makers; and so important were the sculls themselves that race reports often listed the precise specifications of each contestant’s craft (*Aquatics Monthly*, 1873, pp. 830–833).

But even as Eakins’s depictions of himself link him to craft and scientific conventions, they simultaneously downplay his involvement in the production of his images. Most of the works in which Eakins included himself show the artist not in the foreground of the work, but rather off in the distance behind the main protagonists. Whether we examine Eakins’s rendering of himself as a sculler in *Max Schmitt*, as the unofficial scribe seated in the right of *The Gross Clinic* (1875), or as the standing observer at the far right of *The Agnew Clinic*, we see the artist placed far from the picture plane where the painting’s production took place.<sup>2</sup> Eakins’s insertions of himself into his canvases differ markedly from that of the baroque Spanish master Diego Vélezquez, whose work Eakins much admired. In Vélezquez’s royal portrait, *Las Meninas*, the artist appears in the foreground near the center of the painting, caught in the act of portrayal, with brushes and pallet in hand. The prominent placement of Vélezquez’s self-portrait ties him closely to the work’s diegesis, but his placement near the picture plane, where pigment is applied to canvas, also implicates the artist in the creation of the painting itself. While *Las Meninas* pictorially signals Vélezquez’s authorship of the work, Eakins’s paintings, in which the artist appears towards the rear of his canvases, make him appear incidental to the works’ production. In Eakins’s paintings it is Schmitt or the Biglins with their water-dipped oars or Gross and Agnew with blood-stained scalpels who seem to hold creative powers, replacing, as they do, the artist and his paint-soaked brush. The self-portrait in *Max Schmitt*, then, seems doubly to signify Eakins as both artist and non-artist; at the same time it alludes *generally* to his artistry and his skill as a craftsman, by linking him to other artistic and craft traditions, it manages to downplay his *particular* involvement in the creation of the canvas, by distancing him from the site of production.<sup>3</sup>

For a painter who may have felt unease with his manhood, the apparent coupling of his artistic practice and that of the respected craftsmen surely was encouraging. Like the innovative boatbuilders whose work was integral to the rowers’ success, Eakins informs us that his painterly project is similarly meaningful. It is after all his enterprise of recording, of painting, that allows Schmitt to be acknowledged as a champion in our era. Without



Eakins's record of Schmitt's achievement, he would certainly be unknown today. Even Eakins's original title of the work points to his historical project. By naming the work *The Champion Single Sculls* he alerts us to his enterprise of recording, perpetuating Schmitt's accomplishments as assuredly as did the builder of that champion scull.

Eakins's manner of "recording" confirms his project of realism, for by distancing himself from his painted scenes he presents his canvases as if they were "the real," unmediated by his artistry. This realism has frequently been taken by modern commentators as a sign of Eakins's masculinity. Convinced that the strength of Eakins's work lay in its "brutal" honesty, one twentieth-century critic claimed that "American art is so effeminate at present that it would do no harm to have it inoculated with some of that brutality" (Hartmann, 1902, p. 203). Notwithstanding such assertions, Eakins's perceived ability to "replicate" the real was not in the last century a sign of his manhood, for despite the admiration nineteenth-century critics displayed for manliness, they were quick to point to Eakins's exactitude as a fault. Throughout most of the nineteenth century the replication of the real was thought incompatible with ideals of high-art painting (Brownell, 1880, p. 13; Koehler, 1881, p. 110; Shinn, 1881, p. 115). Realism took on an unambiguously masculine tenor only with the rise of the Ashcan school at the turn of the twentieth century. As paintings by artists such as John Sloan, George Luks, and George Bellows were accepted by twentieth-century audiences as masculine, Eakins's works were retrospectively accorded the same masculine air because of the obvious debts, in subject matter and at times in handling, that the younger generation's works clearly owed the artist. Once the paintings were linked, the ideological underpinnings of Eakins's masculinity were subsumed under those of the new century. Eakins's realism became masculine only with the rise of a new ethos that saw the experience of the real as an end unto itself.

In the last century even a man's interest in rowing was no indication of his manliness, for the period's women demonstrated (and were encouraged to show) as much interest in the sport as did men. Period articles make it clear that women regularly made up half the audience for popular sculling matches, while editorials routinely encouraged women's interest in sports (*Aquatics*, 1859, p. 15; 1866, p. 114; 1867, p. 106; 1871, p. 117). Eakins did, of course, participate in many of the sports which he depicted, but for his participation to be regarded as manly, he had to demonstrate success; neither did he equal the rowing victories of Schmitt or the Biglins, nor did the sport excite in him the "ambition to excel" at his art (Carleton, 1856, p. 18). An

editorial on the champion St. John rowers in the *National Police Gazette* (1867b) articulates the period's dominant criteria for judging men when it states: "if men are to be judged by their deeds and performances, then the St. John rowers are assuredly entitled to all the fame and reputation that they now enjoy; as *success*, which is naturally the world's only criterion to judge from, has been theirs to a wonderful degree" (p. 3).

But I want to suggest that even in the early years of the 1870s the meaning of success was undergoing a subtle alteration, allowing it to stand for more than a man's accomplishments in his profession. To illustrate the point I want to examine a painting Eakins made of John Biglin, one of America's most successful single scull racers.<sup>4</sup> The firmly locked wrists and rigid arms evident in *John Biglin in a Single Scull* attest to the rower's physicality while simultaneously pointing to his mechanistic nature. Biglin's left arm meets the oar at an acute angle, redirecting the oar's diagonal thrust towards his chest. The sharp angular meeting of oar and arm is echoed by the angle at which the rower's calf meets his thigh and by the pairs of iron outriggers meeting at the oarlock. Visually, Biglin seems but one part of the machine that he propels. This reading of Biglin as machine-like or mechanical is very much in keeping with late nineteenth-century views of Biglin in particular, and of rowing in general. Aware of mechanical analogies to John Biglin, one 1872 sporting editorial called him a "tough, sinewy specimen of human mechanism" (Ward-Biglin, 1872, p. 178). Period journal and book descriptions of rowers described them variously as "machines," "watch springs," and "pistons" (International, 1872, p. 225; *Spirit of the Times*, 1872, p. 251). One author even likened rowers to steam engines, maintaining that to be successful "the fire-grate and chimneys of the human engine must be kept clear and in perfect working order." So taken was the author with this metaphor that he referred to sweat almost exclusively as "steam" (Wood, 1870, pp. 104-105).

The implications of "Biglin-as-machine" in both the visual and written records are really quite intriguing. In *Bodies and Machines* (1992) Mark Seltzer probes the literary record of America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in an effort to explicate the period's pervading "machine culture." Noting the increasingly blurred borders illustrated by period descriptions of the users, makers and managers of machines, Seltzer argues that the difficulty in locating the domains of production and producer was a peculiar problem of the later nineteenth century. Having detected an anxiety of production in the period's cultural works, he suggests that naturalist novels created a counter-model of generation in an attempt to balance perceived societal problems of production and reproduction. Drawing on the work of

Perry Miller and others Seltzer notes that from the middle of the century on, the association “of steam power and generation . . . (was) part of a larger celebration of technology by which Americans viewed the machine, and especially the steam engine . . . as a replacement for the human body.” It is the male appropriation of production and reproduction which Seltzer sees as the pervasive counter-model in the naturalist novel, guided, in part, by men’s desire “to replace ‘female’ generative power with an alternate practice, at once technological and male” (pp. 27-28).

On one level we can see Eakins’s images of rowers, with their associations with machines and production, as forging links between the spheres of work and leisure. Such links may have helped legitimate emerging recreational culture, given the ambivalence with which Americans of the period regarded leisure pursuits. As Daniel Rogers (1979) has shown, the American ethos which valued work above all else began to decay in the 1850s, evolving by the 1870s into an ideal which advocated a balance of work and leisure. Beginning in the 1870s leisure came to be viewed not as mere idleness or indolence but rather as an antidote to the excesses of Gilded-Age practices of labor. As *The Christian Union* put it, in the early 1870s, Americans now had “the duty of play” (pp. 94-124, 102).

For middle-class Americans, whose regime of work involved predominantly mental labor, the rowing paintings also pointed to contemporary concerns for balancing mental and physical exertions. Beginning in the first half of the century, and becoming increasingly fashionable towards the 1870s, “self-culture” books counselled Americans to work towards such a balance. In these decades both mental and physical activity were thought necessary for sound health, just as each could cause breakdowns if taken to extremes. Writing in his popular book, *The Intellectual Life* (1873), Philip Hamerton observed “that the excessive exercise of the mental powers is injurious to bodily health, and that all intellectual labor proceeds upon a physical basis” (p. 5). In 1874 John Blackie argued against those who thought that mental activity alone could promote good health, warning that a dearth of exercise would result in “the clogging of the wheels of the internal parts of the fleshy frame, and various shades of stomachic and cerebral discomfort” (p. 58).

Hamerton’s and Blackie’s advice was echoed by Eakins’s friend, the Philadelphia doctor S. Weir Mitchell. Ministering predominantly to America’s elite, Mitchell built on the neurasthenia theories of George M. Beard and developed his own “rest cure” for those afflicted by nervousness. The doctrine espoused in his work, *Wear and Tear, or Hints For the Overworked* (1871), neatly dovetails with the advice offered by the period’s self-culture tracts as to the

need for balancing mental and physical pursuits. In his pre-Freudian world Mitchell assured his patients that “nothing is now more sure in hygienic science than that a proper alternation of physical and mental labor is best fitted to insure a lifetime of wholesome and rigorous intellectual exertion” (p. 19).

Such cultural prescriptions would have been welcomed by Eakins, as they initiated a shift in how society calculated male identity. The societal evaluations that saw mental exertion (work) alone as unwise, even reckless, and physical activity (sports) as beneficial, heralded a middle-class standard of manhood in which one’s masculinity was not solely predicated on work. By advocating the value of men’s participation in physical activities that were not directly job related, the period’s writers effectively articulated a reevaluation of manhood. This evolving rhetoric, which sought to balance work with leisure and mental with physical activity, opened the door on a conception of masculinity that was not predicated on traditional notions of success alone.

On another, deeper level of signification the rowing works can also be seen to express the anxiety of production that Seltzer detected most pervasively in fiction of the late nineteenth century. In light of the written and visual records coupling rowers to “pistons” and “steam engines” and given nineteenth-century rhetoric on the generative power of industrial machinery it is not difficult to understand Biglin’s image as an emblem of productivity, nor is it hard to comprehend why issues of production would have been of concern to a man whose artistic “productions” were so unsuccessful.

Given the growing gendered bifurcation between female (consuming) and male (producing) cultures in late nineteenth-century middle-class America, it seems plausible that Eakins would have desired to appropriate the now-masculinized symbols of production by allying himself closely with male traditions of work and distancing himself from labor that was gendered female (Chodorow, 1978, pp. 4-6, 178-180; Rotundo, 1983, p. 30; Ryan, 1975, pp. 139, 144). By associating himself with the innovative boatbuilders, the famous rowers who produced victories and the industrial machinery of production (as well as by downplaying his participation in the effeminate act of painting), Eakins forged a metaphoric link to the male world. And by affecting the subtle negation of his painterly craft in *Max Schmitt*, Eakins distanced himself from his emasculated societal position at the same time that he allowed his canvas to make allusions to the very products of industry. By clouding the authorship of the work, Eakins drew parallels between his “artistless” canvas and the mass-produced products of industry, divorced as they appear from their human makers.

The recreational melding of man and machine also allowed the period's men to negotiate the new demands expounded by those who sought to balance mind and body. In industrial America working-class men were obliged to perform predominantly physical work, while males of the middle and upper classes were engaged solely in labor that S. Weir Mitchell called "brain work." The practices of late nineteenth-century industry circumscribed the decision-making capabilities of laborers at the same time that they limited the physical activity of managers (Brod, 1987, p. 14). Given the inherent separation of roles built into the system it became very difficult to arrive at the mental/physical balance that so many advocates of good health were calling for. Rowing, however, offered both a site and an activity that could bridge the gap in each classes' masculinities; at the same time that it offered laborers the opportunity to make choices and command their own bodies, it afforded wealthier participants the chance to gain the physicality they lacked in their daily routines.<sup>5</sup> It was perhaps the very impossibility of successfully negotiating the disparate and contradictory demands of Victorian masculinity which enhanced rowing's popularity.

If industrial America of the 1870s had failed America's working classes through its deflationary crises, low wages, unemployment, seasonal work, cyclical recessions, loss of economic independence, and dangerous working conditions, rowing, as a true meritocracy, with its codified rules and tangible rewards for success, must have held out an appealing promise to the working class. Being tied to a machine for ten hours a day at an assembly line was clearly not the promise of civilization that everyone had hoped for; rowing's popularity may therefore have been closely allied with its metaphoric ability to make good on the potentialities of the Protestant work ethic and industrialism. One may posit that during the last century the image of a successful man wedded to a machine by choice, for pleasure, may have held appeal for workers grown weary of the broken promises of industrialism.

For the very wealthy the works, additionally, offered confirmation of what industrialists wanted to believe; namely, that their success was attained through a struggle where skill and determination were the only factors driving advancement. In a vague, nonthreatening manner the works served to further an optimistic view of what middle- and working-class men could achieve if they worked hard enough. For a group that was increasingly ministered to about the value of relaxation, the images suggested an alternate means of "production" that bridged the gap between brain work and leisurely sports, offering a transitional space between the strict work ethic of the early part of the century and the ethos of leisure at its close.

By suggesting various cultural functions of Eakins's rowing works (and rowing tangentially) I do not mean to ignore the serious criticism that many historians have levelled against sports. While some popular sports of the 1870s (such as croquet and tennis) offered physical relaxation, providing a thorough break from the working day, other more exhausting ones (like football and rowing) are often described as a continuation of the period's practices of work. Because many sports further the interests of capital, critics have tended to view them as little better than the sweat shops of the industrial revolution. Some have even imagined sports to be more insidious than the factories themselves for the obfuscating role that they served in furthering the inequities of industrialism. For example, the Frankfurt School theorist Theodor Adorno contended that "modern sports . . . seek to restore the body some of the functions of which the machine has deprived it. But they do so only in order to train men all the more inexorably to serve the machine" (Adorno, 1967, p. 81). The historian Donald Mrozek calls sports, "the religious ritual of the machine age—sacrifice without purpose, performance without magic, obsolescence without compensation, and value without meaning" (Mrozek, 1983, p. 11). Despite dangers inherent in the hegemony of nineteenth-century sports, my goal has not been to pronounce sentence on the rowing works, concluding finally that they are either reactionary or radical, but rather to offer suggestions as to how the works may have functioned metaphorically for Victorian men.

For both Eakins and his contemporaries the rowing works offered specific (but varying) metaphoric strategies for negotiating the complicated and at times contradictory demands of Victorian manhood. If the linking of man to machines in the workplace was as yet an imperfect experiment, then surely the Schmitts and the Biglins of the world represented how technologies might work. Eakins's rowing canvases can be seen as a promise of the potential offered by the modern world, even if the realities of late nineteenth—and even twentieth-century—America have yet to catch up with the ideal.

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- 1 For other extended discussions of the rowing works see: Johns, 1983: 19–45; Wilson, 1987: 410–430; Foster, 1994[*sic*: 1997]; Wolf, 1994.
  - 2 Eakins painted only one “traditional” self-portrait (and one sketch) over a career that spanned more than forty years. The work was completed in 1902, not at the artist’s instigation, but rather to fulfill an entrance requirement of the National Academy of Design. Other exceptions to Eakins’s practice of showing himself only in the distance include many paintings where the artist’s signature is painted into the work, apparently receding back from the picture plane. Among these paintings are *Kathrin with Cat* (1874), *Elizabeth at the Piano* (1875) and *The Thinker* (1900). Bolstering an argument that I will make below, I see these elegant script signatures negating the existence of a picture plane, so helping to downplay Eakins’s act of painting while they stress his connection to craft traditions. Aside from the 1902 self-portrait only Eakins’s painting of *The Swimming Hole* (1889) offers a pictorial representation of the artist that mediates the space between viewers and the work’s protagonists.
  - 3 For critical discussions which equate the surgeon’s scalpel with the painter’s brush see: Lubin, 1985, pp. 51, 162 note 17; Fried, 1987, pp. 15–16, 54–55, 67, 88–89. For an interesting extrapolation of these arguments see: Bryan J. Wolf’s essay on Eakins’s *Portrait of Professor Henry A. Rowland* in Wilmerding, 1993, p. 132. For a discussion which sees a “heroic” conflation in Eakins’s art of the roles of painter, surgeon, and rower see: Bercovitch, 1986, pp. 161–162.
  - 4 While Schmitt was both an amateur racer and a member of the professional classes, Biglin was a professional racer who, according to New York City directories, worked variously during the 1860s and 1870s as a “mechanic,” “laborer,” “foreman,” “fireman,” and “boatman.” The year after Eakins painted *John Biglin in a Single Scull* Biglin’s profession was listed as “laborer” in *Goulding’s*, 1875, p. 97. The differing class standing of the two rowers mirrors the broad appeal rowing held for both middle- and working-class Americans. For a discussion of nineteenth-century American rowing as a sport which transcended class divisions see: Mendenhall, 1980, p. 23.
  - 5 Despite the “balance” accorded to the laborers’ lives it would be fair to state that their freedoms remained highly circumscribed. While rowing may have granted working-class men the opportunity to direct their own physical activities (at least for a time) as they rubbed shoulders with men of the middle and upper classes, and while it promoted the appearance of symmetry between the lives of white and blue collar workers, it did not offer working men control over their alienated labor in the market place. What rowing did offer, however, and this is by no means unimportant, was a reconciliation of masculine ideologies.



# “The Most Beautiful of Nature’s Works”: Thomas Eakins’s Photographic Nudes in their French and American Contexts

ANNE McCAULEY, 1994

## Singing the Body Electric in Philadelphia

The story of Eakins’s dismissal from the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in February 1886, presumably for showing a completely nude male model to the women’s life-drawing class, has become legendary in American art history. Scholars concede that many factors contributed to his forced resignation: the growing dissatisfaction of a group of students regarding his teaching philosophy; occasional complaints from mothers about the emphasis on nudity and about students modeling for one another in the nude; Eakins’s demands for a higher salary and loss of support on the board of directors after Fairman Rogers’s withdrawal in 1883.<sup>1</sup> In the best explanation to date, Kathleen Foster pinpoints the rumors spread by one student, Alice Barber, who recounted posing nude for Eakins in his own studio, as well as accounts of improper behavior within the Eakins household, as significant reasons for Eakins’s downfall.<sup>2</sup>

Almost entirely absent from the story however, are considerations of public opinion in Philadelphia at the time. In the Eakins literature the city has generally been cast as conservative and prudish, just as the United States as a whole has been painted as intolerant of nudes in art. Eakins’s role as heroic iconoclast, a man before his time, has often been implicitly attributed to his assimilation of French values and sexual openness. There is some evidence that even at the time of his dismissal, the approach that he had introduced at the Pennsylvania Academy was considered European: a student letter to the press reported that “Gérôme, Cabanel, Bouguereau—in fact any French professor—would scoff at the idea of any one attending a ‘Life Model Class’ if the ‘points’ so necessary in gaining the correct movement, proportion and swing of the figure, were covered.”<sup>3</sup> Other defenders protested that Americans were provincials with false modesty and that art students could not be subject to the same strictures as other people with less disinterested approaches to the human body.

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Anne McCauley, “The Most Beautiful of Nature’s Works: Thomas Eakins’s Photographic Nudes in their French and American Contexts,” in Susan Danly and Cheryl Leibold, ***Eakins and the Photograph: Works by Thomas Eakins and His Circle in the Collection of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts*** (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press for the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, 1994), 23–63. Excerpt, pp. 52ff. Courtesy of Anne McCauley, Dept. of Art and Archeology, Princeton University.

The 1880s, however, were marked by repeated attacks on all that Eakins increasingly seemed to stand for. As the attacks spread, he became more outspoken, more committed to freedom of expression. Although he was always scornful of public opinion, the directors of the Pennsylvania Academy were not. Their concern about the appropriateness of Eakins's position as director of instruction was shaped by fears of legal as well as social reprisals.

In the aftermath of the Civil War, abolitionist and temperance energies were in many cases directed to new causes—the declining moral standards in the country and the perceived growth of prostitution and the notorious “white slave trade.” The most famous layman to take it upon himself to eradicate evil in the form of vicious literature, entertainment, and art was Anthony Comstock, a former dry-goods clerk. Comstock's rise to national prominence as the enforcer of the Comstock Law of 1873, which prohibited any “obscene” materials from passing through the U.S. mails,<sup>4</sup> depended on the infusion of money and backing that he received from many of the new American industrial and commercial barons. Men such as William E. Dodge, Jr. (a copper magnate, founder of Phelps Dodge, and president of the New York Y.M.C.A.), and Morris Ketchum Jesup (a merchant, banker, railroad financier, founder of the New York Museum of Natural History, and future president of the New York Chamber of Commerce, who advanced Comstock \$650 early in his campaign) used philanthropy to promote social stability and counter the lowered productivity bred by “vices.” Many of the same men promoting Comstock were involved in the New England Society for the Suppression of Vice, founded in 1873: the first president was Samuel Colgate, who headed his family's soap business in New Jersey; the vice-presidents were Dodge and Alfred Barnes, a textbook publisher; and the treasurer was Kiliaen van Rensselaer, heir of the famous Hudson River patroon family.<sup>5</sup>

With such powerful friends, Comstock began a sweeping seizure of offensive books, photographs, contraceptive devices, and persons involved in their production and distribution. An 1874 Y.M.C.A. pamphlet claimed that 194,000 obscene pictures and photos had been seized.<sup>6</sup> Comstock himself published in 1880 a table itemizing 202,679 obscene images, 7,400 “microscopic pictures for charms, knives, etc.,” and 1,700 obscene negatives among the mass of materials that he had confiscated during the course of some 140,000 miles traveled outside New York City.<sup>7</sup>

In his many published books and pamphlets, Comstock carefully explained the dangers of such pictures: “The effect of this cursed business on our youth and society, no pen can describe. It breeds lust. Lust defiles the

body, debauches the imagination, corrupts the mind, deadens the will, destroys the memory, sears the conscience, hardens the heart, and damns the soul.”<sup>8</sup> Expounding in *Traps for the Young* on “artistic and classical traps,” Comstock revealed his criteria for acceptable public art and pointedly distinguished between paintings and photographs:

Is a photograph of an obscene figure or picture a work of art? My answer is emphatically, No. A work of art is made up of many elements that are wanting in a photograph of the same, precisely as there is a marked difference between a woman in her proper womanly apparel and modest appearance, and when shorn of all these and posed in a lewd posture. Because we are above savages, we clothe our nakedness. So with a work of art as compared to a copy. . . . The lines of beauty, the mingling colors, tintings, and shadings, all seem to clothe the figures by diverting attention from that which, if taken alone, is objectionable. . . . What is the difference, in point of morals or decency, between a photograph of a nude woman in a lewd posture, with a lascivious look on her face, and a photograph of the same form and the same expression, taken from a piece of canvas? It is the original picture which represents the skill and talent of the artist.<sup>9</sup>

Figure paintings were dangerous in their own right and should be shown only to cultivated audiences in museums. Photographs (even photographs of paintings), however, had no redeeming aesthetic virtues.<sup>10</sup>

Comstock’s fanatical pursuit of cheap crime novels, obscene art and reproductions, and advocates of free love was not an isolated, aberrant, right-wing assault but part of a national movement. Close to home in Eakins’s Philadelphia, Comstock found a kindred soul in the person of Josiah W. Leeds, a Quaker and former grammar-school history teacher who had been active in the early 1870s in the peace movement and the Prohibition Party.<sup>11</sup> Like Comstock, Leeds directed his reformist energies to lewd entertainment, such as the can-can dancing in variety halls fed by the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition and to penny papers for boys that glamorized crime and the underworld. He shared Comstock’s taste for pamphleteering and published “Concerning Household Games and Gambling” (1883), “The Theatre” (1884), “Concerning Printed Poison” (1885) and “Simplicity of Attire in Relation to Social Purity” (1886).

During the 1880s Leeds and his sympathizers extended their public-relations campaign against immoral behavior to actual criminal charges. In 1881 Leeds went after a Philadelphia firm, R. C. Brown and Company, that used enticing young women in advertisements. In his irate reply to Leeds, Brown charged that the images were not prurient: "We defy you or anyone else to point out to us any obscene point in our card and we deny that the mere exposure of limbs in our advertisement is sufficient to precipitate any sound minded person into dissipation. . . . We don't know who or what you are, but it is quite evident you have never seen certain masterpieces of paintings and sculpture which are to be seen even in this country."<sup>12</sup> By 1884 Leeds had begun petitioning the City Council to prohibit the sale of pernicious literature in public buildings and demanded that all newsdealers be required to have permits. In September 1884 he pointed out an objectionable poster on Sansom Street, and in December one of his followers publicly criticized "things to be seen in the window of a museum on Chestnut Street, above Seventh. No one surely wants the female members of our families nor anyone else to see those things."<sup>13</sup>

The founding in 1885 of a Citizen's Representative Committee of Philadelphia (popularly known as the Moral Committee of One Hundred), led by the Reverend J. Gray Bolton, paralleled stepped-up arrests of persons who threatened moral principles. In May 1885 Leeds had William Gilmore of the New Central Theatre arrested for posting indecent pictures of women in tights. Gilmore was convicted and sentenced in October. The following year Leeds went after photographs of female tobacco workers that were included in all boxes of five hundred cigarettes. Referring to Comstock's writings he claimed: "I am not opposed to art or the nude in art, but the line is so fine that only those educated in art can appreciate where beauty ends and vulgarity begins."<sup>14</sup>

Another target of Leeds's indicting glance was sports, particularly competitive and intercollegiate games. In 1883 he wrote, "I have not to object to such employment, within reasonable limits, whether it be in the way of running, leaping, ball-playing, rowing or similar bodily exercises. It is simply to that abuse of skilled athletic practice, which has lead to those competitive inter-collegiate and other marches."<sup>15</sup> Two years later he asked Mayor William B. Smith of Philadelphia to stop the McCaffrey-Sullivan boxing match and succeeded in getting it canceled with the help of the district attorney, George Graham.<sup>16</sup>

Considering the difficulty of controlling access to art so that only the cultivated might see it, Leeds and his mentor Comstock, were suspicious of

all aesthetic products. After examining bound reproductions of the 1878 Paris art exhibition, Leeds found the book so “filled with illustrations of the decidedly sensuous, that I felt sure it could only be rightly treated by burning.”<sup>17</sup> In March 1887 he managed to get a law passed prohibiting lewd pictures, defined as representations of the “human form in nude or semi-nude condition” but “not to be confused with purely scientific works written on the subject of sexual physiology or works of art.”<sup>18</sup> The problem was, of course, distinguishing “art” from lewd pictures. Leeds had the saloon owner Robert Steel arrested in 1888 for displaying *The Temptation of Saint Anthony* by Louis Garnier in his establishment at Broad and Chestnut streets. The painting was one of two life-sized depictions of nude women decorating the bar. After Steel argued that the work had been exhibited in the Paris Salon, Leeds observed that “Parisian art was no criterion for art in this city.”<sup>19</sup> His words echoed those of Comstock who had written him in 1887 to warn that the new issue was “whether the lewd and indecent [pictures] of the Salon of Paris may break from their bonds, cross the water and debauch the minds of children of this country.”<sup>20</sup>

Thomas Eakins never mentioned either Comstock or Leeds, but, as a Philadelphian, he had to know and be outraged by their campaigns. His brother-in-law William Crowell, in a letter chiding Eakins for making his pupils pose in the nude, feared that his own children under Eakins’s tutelage might pick up “that to me exceedingly offensive agglomeration of pettiness that is called ‘Bohemianism,’ less respectable even, I think, than Comstockery because harder in its subjects to get rid of.”<sup>21</sup> Crowell’s positioning of Comstockery as unrespectable is telling, in that it shows his unwillingness to ally himself with such an extreme camp. But his fear of bohemianism, which he identifies with Eakins, is equally crucial, placing the artist among the free-wheeling opponents of Comstock and Leeds.

The major group that coalesced to stop Comstock and the moral-purity movement that he embodied was the National Liberal League, which held its founding convention in Philadelphia in 1876. The league’s major goal was the separation of church and state, but it defended all attacks on the Constitution, including Comstock’s attempts to limit free speech. Made up of freethinkers, the league was also in favor of women’s suffrage and, in its more radical factions, included communists and promoters of free love. Robert G. Ingersoll, America’s most respected atheist, was a member, as were the publisher D. M. Bennett and Ezra Heywood, a socialist leader of the New England Free Love League based in Princeton, Massachusetts. Other opponents (and targets) of Comstock in the 1870s included Victoria Claflin

Woodhull and Tennessee Claflin, two outspoken advocates of equality for women, free love, and communism, who managed a New York brokerage firm and edited *Woodhull and Claflin's Weekly*.<sup>22</sup> In the pages of this radical journal they published the novels of George Sand, interviewed Karl Marx, championed women artists, and encouraged women to enter politics.

Although Eakins was not one to join social movements, he shared many traits with the anti-Comstock faction. Anticlerical, open to the latest in foreign ideas, he probably sympathized with the sexual frankness that marked many of Comstock's enemies. *The Human Body—The Temple of God; or, the Philosophy of Sociology* (1890), a compilation of lectures given by Woodhull and Claflin from 1869 to 1877, noted that "only those are ashamed of any parts of the body whose secret thoughts are impure" and "when there is purity in the heart, it cannot be obscene to consider the natural functions of any part of the body, whether male or female."<sup>23</sup> These words echo those of Eakins, as does the text of R. T. Trall's controversial *Sexual Physiology*—a book for which the author was arrested repeatedly. Its clinical discussion of male and female sex organs and their functions was accompanied by an argument that sex should be pleasurable to both partners and that women had the right to accept or refuse sexual activity.<sup>24</sup> What Eakins thought about sexual practice is not known, but his behavior and advocacy of equal training for women artists suggests a rather advanced attitude.<sup>25</sup>

During a time when the medical establishment was split on many social-purity issues, a doctor who was one of Eakins's best-known friends was involved in an early debate that pitted science against the upholders of moral order. In the early 1870s controversy over the regulation of prostitution, in which several prominent physicians spoke out in favor of the adoption of the French system of legalization and control, Dr. Samuel Gross emerged as a leading Philadelphia regulationist. He was opposed by Dr. Harriet French and several Quaker members of the Moral Education Society of Philadelphia.<sup>26</sup> Given the fundamentalist nature of the debate, there is reason to speculate that many of Eakins's other scientific acquaintances shared his aversion to the promoters of moral purity.

By the newspaper clippings that he saved, we know that Eakins was aware of the outrage being provoked by nudity in art throughout English-speaking countries. A story in the *Philadelphia Evening Telegraph* on November 12, 1878, reported that Liverpool papers had attacked an exhibition including nudes in paintings, specifically Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema's *Sculptor's Model* (1877). The painting, known today only through a photogravure, depicted a frontal, full-length nude woman with an all-too-contemporary facial type and

hair-do, posing on a raised platform in the foreground for an intent, toga-clad sculptor. In response to the controversy, a paper defending “The Nude in Art” was read at the Social Science Congress at Cheltenham. Claiming that the human form was the standard of all beauty, the speaker remarked that “in French art there have been questionable nude figures exhibited; but the fault was not that they were nude, but that they were the portraits of ugly, immodest women.”<sup>27</sup> Heartened by such overseas defeats of prudery and surrounded by friends who were well-known scientists and artists and who undoubtedly considered Comstock and his followers to be crackpot extremists, Eakins underestimated the political clout that the promoters of moral purity were able to muster in his hometown.

The Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts apparently could not afford to ignore local public opinion. Leeds and his followers may or may not have exerted direct pressure on Edward H. Coates, chairman of the Committee on Instruction, in 1886, when Eakins was fired (no evidence survives in documents suggesting their complicity), but they certainly complained in 1891, when the Academy’s annual exhibition included depictions of several provocative nude women. A group of “Christian women” protested in February “an offense to womanhood, an attack on the delicacy of our daughters and the morality of our sons.”<sup>28</sup> Later that month Leeds himself wrote to Coates and claimed that the offensive paintings by William Dodge, Alexander Harrison, and others were as improper as the large canvas in Steel’s saloon that had been removed after the establishment was threatened with the loss of its license. Citing his successful arrest of the manager of the Variety Theater for exhibiting “vile posters,” Leeds insinuated that the display of nakedness at the Pennsylvania Academy could be used by such criminal entrepreneurs as a way to justify their own exhibits of nude bodies.<sup>29</sup> Several Philadelphia officers of the local Social Purity Alliance then wrote to the Academy’s board of directors on March 7 and called for women on the exhibition committee, removal of offensive works from the permanent collection, and resistance to the nefarious influence of foreign literary and artistic movements. Claiming that they were not objecting to all presentations of the human form, “a work of God” that is “essentially beautiful and pure,” the writers protested “the so-called ‘realism’ which portrays figures suggestive, not of any ideal truth or sentiment, but only of the fact of nudity.”<sup>30</sup> Far from being the fanatics that Eakins may have thought them to be, local followers of social purity included leading Quakers, the dean of Swarthmore College, and the president of the Pennsylvania Society for Prevention of Crime and Vice, as well as a host of philanthropic leaders who must have constituted

a notable part of the Pennsylvania Academy's funding base. The only surprising thing about Coates's dismissal of Eakins was that it did not come earlier.

If any proof were needed that Eakins aligned himself with liberal factions in Philadelphia both before and after his tenure at the Pennsylvania Academy, it could be found in the subjects that he chose to make the focus of his art. As vociferously as Josiah Leeds and Anthony Comstock attacked nudity, prize fighting, theaters, ballet, Sunday bathing, French art, Walt Whitman, and honesty in regard to bodily functions, Eakins championed them in paint and photography. The human body, whether sedated under the scalpel of Dr. Gross, relaxing in Arcadia, lounging by a river, or stretching in a boxing ring, confronts the viewer with all its strengths and faults, its bulging biceps and bony elbows. Selecting a medium identified with unvarnished truth, Eakins used the camera to celebrate the variety of the "most beautiful of Nature's works," as he wrote in his defense in 1886. The body, which Woodhull and Claflin called the "garden of Eden,"<sup>31</sup> was similarly for Eakins the symbol of a purer life before the Fall—a world in which men and women had lived without the weight of sin and false modesty.

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- 1 Lloyd Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins*, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press for National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 1982), vol. 1, pp. 281-87.
  - 2 Kathleen A. Foster and Cheryl Leibold, *Writing About Eakins: The Manuscripts in Charles Bregler's Thomas Eakins Collection* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press for The Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, 1989), pp. 69-90.
  - 3 H. C. Cresson to *Philadelphia Evening Item*, quoted in Goodrich 1982, vol. 1, p. 289.
  - 4 A federal law against mailing obscene books and pictures, passed in 1868, had been poorly enforced. See Anthony Comstock, *Frauds Exposed* (1880; reprint, Montclair, N.J.: Patterson Smith, 1969), p. 389.
  - 5 See Paul S. Boyer, *Purity in Print: The Vice-Society Movement and Book Censorship in America* (New York: Charles Scribner's, 1968), p. 5.
  - 6 Quoted in Heywood Broun and Margaret Leech, *Anthony Comstock* (New York: A. and C. Boni, 1929), p.153.
  - 7 Comstock 1969, p. 435.
  - 8 Comstock 1969, p. 416.
  - 9 Anthony Comstock, *Traps for the Young* (1883; reprint Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967), pp. 171-72.



- 10 In the pamphlet "Morals vs. Art" (1887), Comstock pursued this subject further and commented on the seizure in November 1887 of 117 photographs of works of living French artists from Knoedler's Gallery in New York. He claimed that he wanted not to suppress French art but to banish "cheap lewd French photographs." Reprinted in Comstock 1967, p. xxv.
- 11 Leeds papers, box 950, Haverford College Library, Pa. I thank the staff of the Rare Book Room at the Haverford College Library for research assistance.
- 12 R. C. Brown and Company to Leeds, dated April 12, 1881, in Leeds Scrapbook, vol. 1, Haverford College Library.
- 13 Clipping, dated December 10, 1884, *ibid.*, vol. 2.
- 14 Clipping, dated June 21, 1886, *ibid.*, vol. 3.
- 15 Comment, dated June 30, 1883, *ibid.*, vol. 2.
- 16 Clipping, "Local Affairs," *Philadelphia Ledger*, April 1, 1881, *ibid.*
- 17 Clipping, "Dealing with Pernicious Prints," *Union Signal*, March 29, 1888, *ibid.*, vol. 4.
- 18 "The Law against Lewd Picture," *Daily Local News* (Huntington, Pa.), June 22, 1887, *ibid.*
- 19 "Steel's St. Anthony," *Press*, January 17, 1888, *ibid.*
- 20 Anthony Comstock to Josiah W. Leeds, November 21, 1887, *ibid.*
- 21 William J. Crowell to Thomas Eakins, April 10, 1890, Pennsylvania Academy Archives.
- 22 Heywood, Claflin, Woodhull, and Bennett were all arrested by Comstock. Bennett was charged with selling and distributing Heywood's pamphlet *Cupid's Yoke* (1876). He circulated a petition opposing the Comstock Law and got 70,000 names. Heywood himself was arrested in 1877 for mailing R. T. Trall's *Sexual Physiology*. A meeting was held at Faneuil Hall in Boston on August 1, 1878, to protest his arrest, and he eventually received a presidential pardon. In 1882 Comstock arrested him again for *Cupid's Yoke* and a second tract, *The Word Extra*, which contained Whitman's poems "To a Common Prostitute" and "A Woman Waits for Me." Victoria Woodhull was arrested in 1872 for libelous exposure of the illicit love life of Henry Ward Beecher, see Broun and Leech 1927, pp. 82ff. and 177ff.; Sidney Warren, *American Freethought, 1860-1914* (New York: Gordian Press, 1966); and Comstock 1969, pp. 392-426.
- 23 Victoria C. Woodhull and Tennessee C. Claflin, *The Human Body—The Temple of God; or the Philosophy of Sociology* (London, 1890), pp. 31, 33.
- 24 R. T. Trall, *Sexual Physiology*, 28th ed. (New York: M. L. Holbrook, 1881), pp. xi, 245.
- 25 His reported loose language and telling of off-color stories to his female students (to say nothing of the famous episode of dropping his trousers to make an anatomical point) could by modern standards be considered sexual harassment. But much of his "scandalous" behavior is consistent with the open discussions of sexuality and these organs among both men and women that the progressive members of the National Liberal League advocated.
- 26 David J. Pivat, *Purity Crusade—Sexual Morality and Social Control, 1868-1900* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1973), p. 61.

- 27** "The Nude in Art," *Evening Telegraph*, November 12, 1878, Pennsylvania Academy Archives. Alma-Tadema's painting is reproduced in Vern G. Swanson, *Alma Tadema: The Painter of the Victorian Vision of the Ancient World* (London: Charles Scribner's, 1977), p. 22. Swanson says that the work was criticized by the Bishop of Carlisle as "mischievous" but does not cite the Liverpool controversy.
- 28** Letter to Committee of Selection, February 1891, Pennsylvania Academy Archives.
- 29** Josiah W. Leeds to Edward H. Coates, February 28, 1891, Pennsylvania Academy Archives.
- 30** William N. McVickar, president [rector of the Episcopal Holy Trinity Church in Philadelphia, 1843–1910]; Elizabeth B. Justice May, secretary; Joseph May [Unitarian minister], Mary Grew, and T. P. Stevenson, committee, for the Social Purity Alliance, to Edward H. Coates, William Baker, and other directors of the Pennsylvania Academy, March, 1891, Pennsylvania Academy Archives. McVickar and the Mays were members of the executive board of the American Purity Alliance in 1895. See Pivat 1973, Appendix A.
- 31** Woodhull and Claflin 1890, p.34.

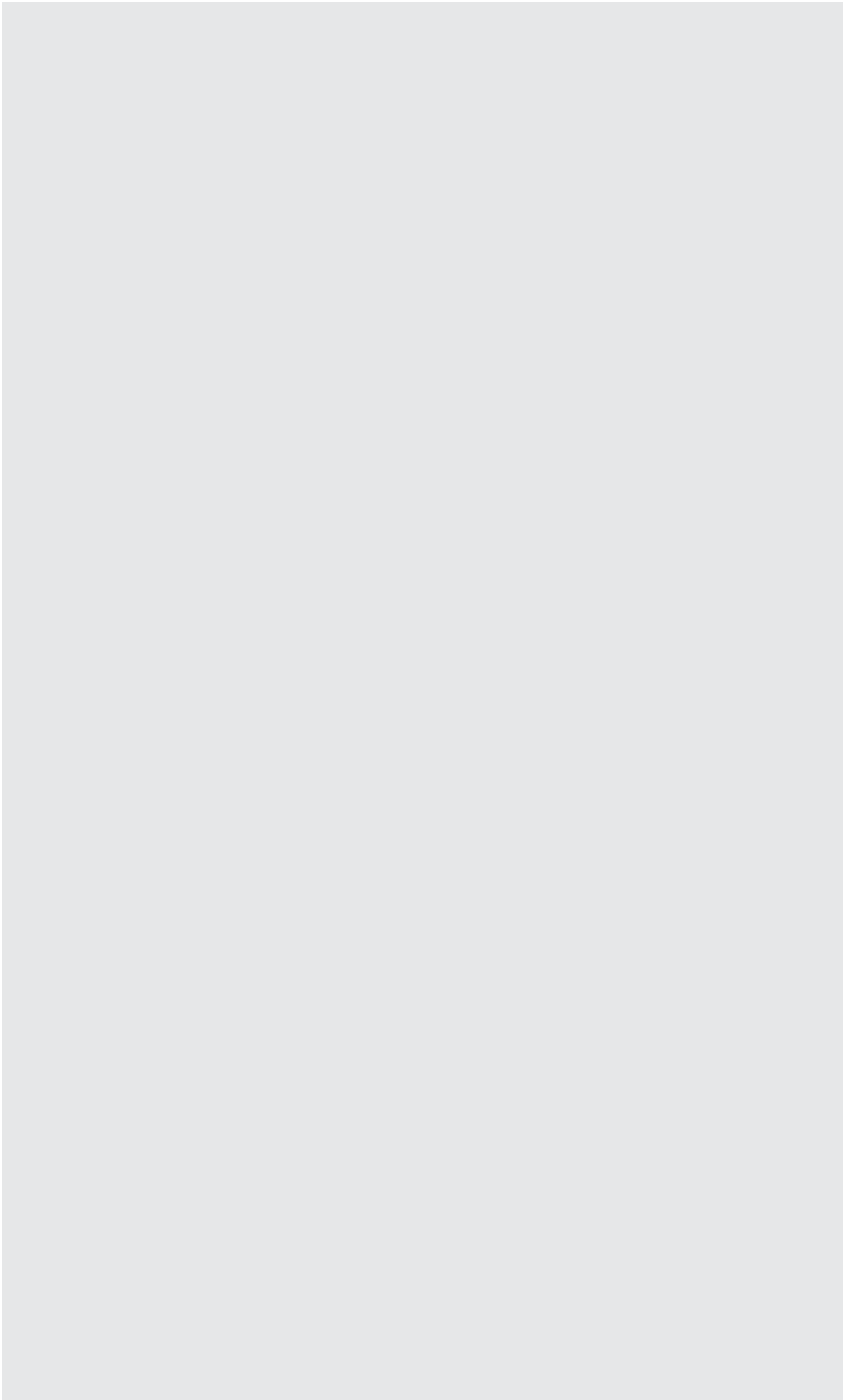
# **Erotic Revision in Thomas Eakins's Narratives of Male Nudity**

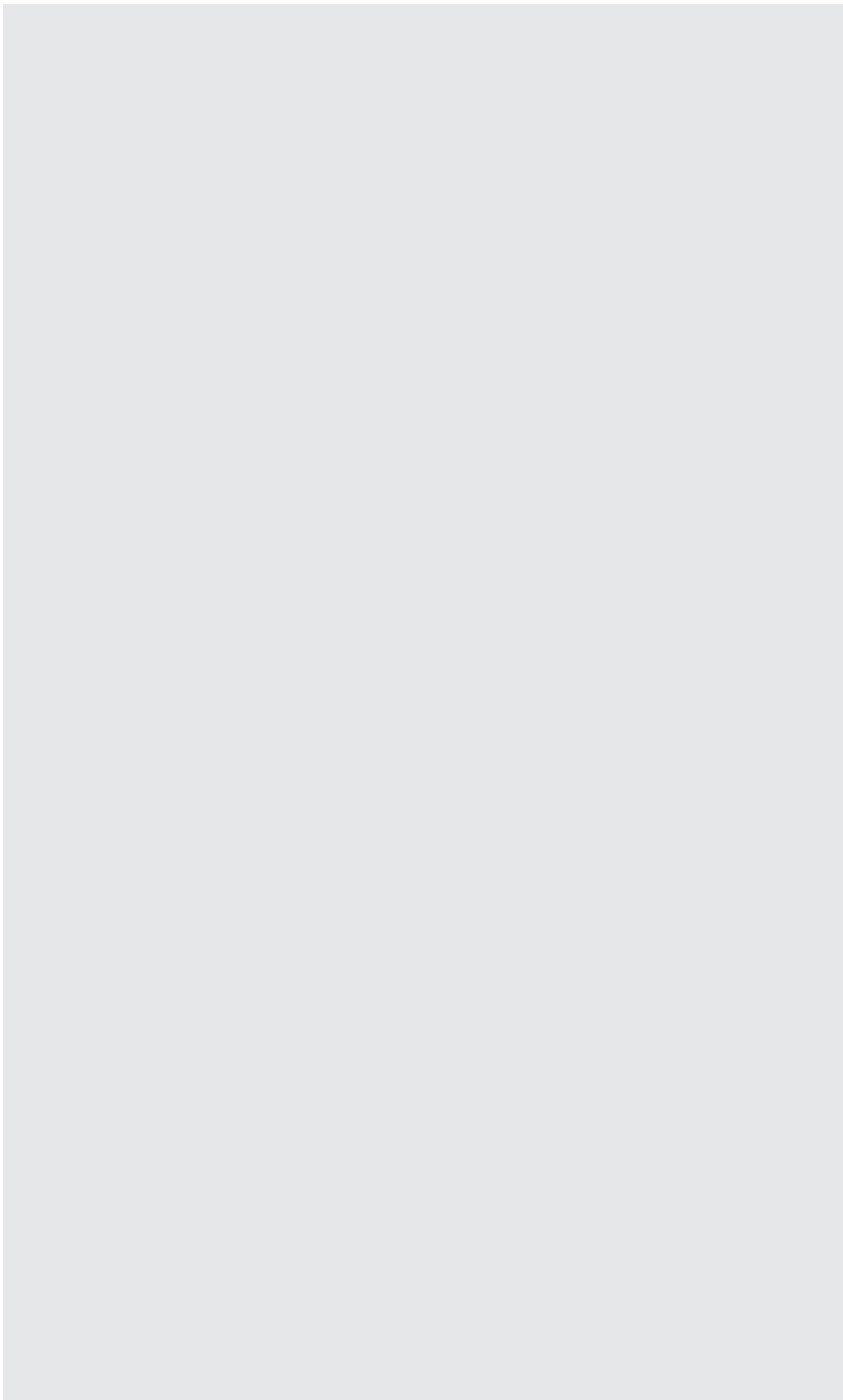
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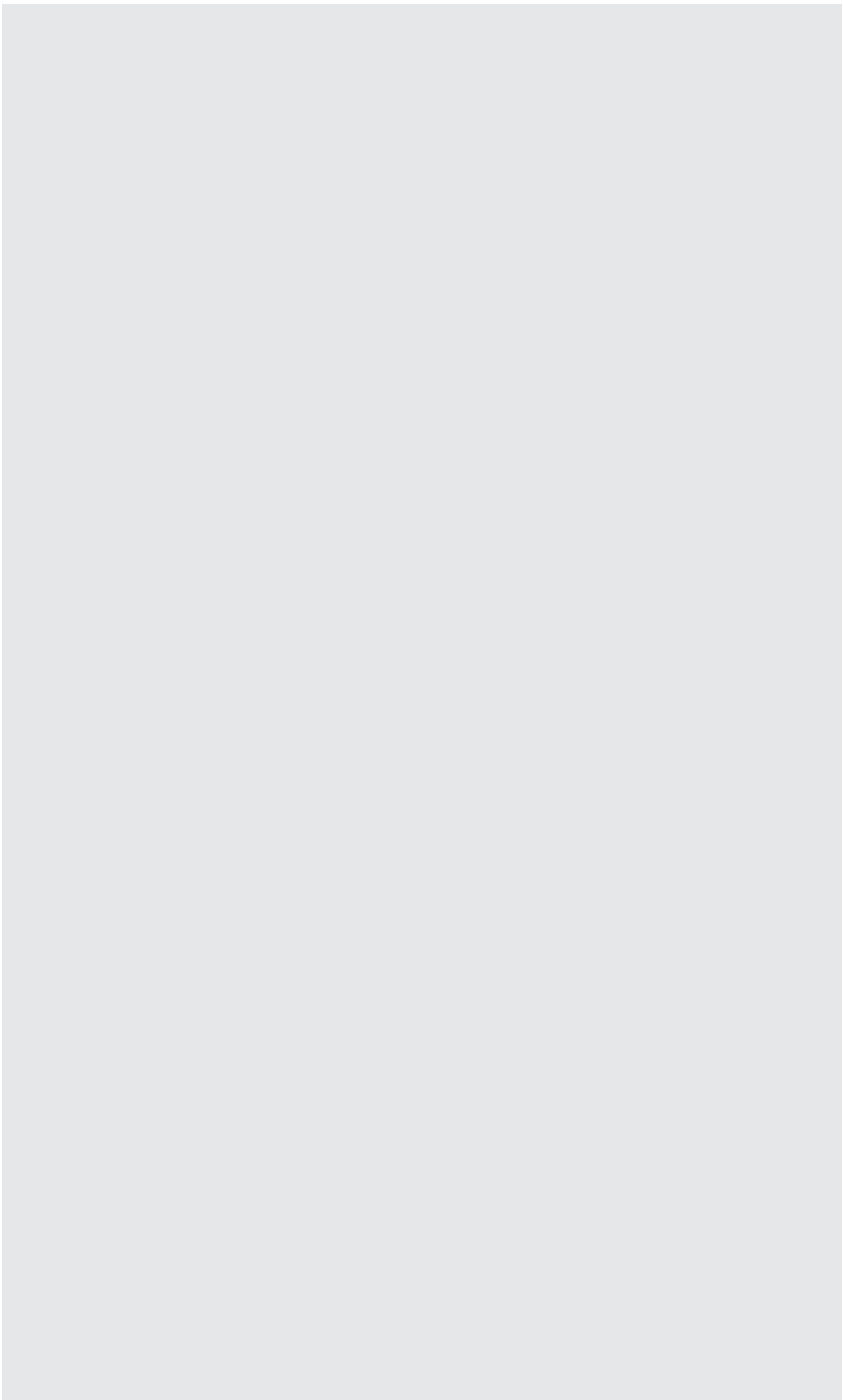
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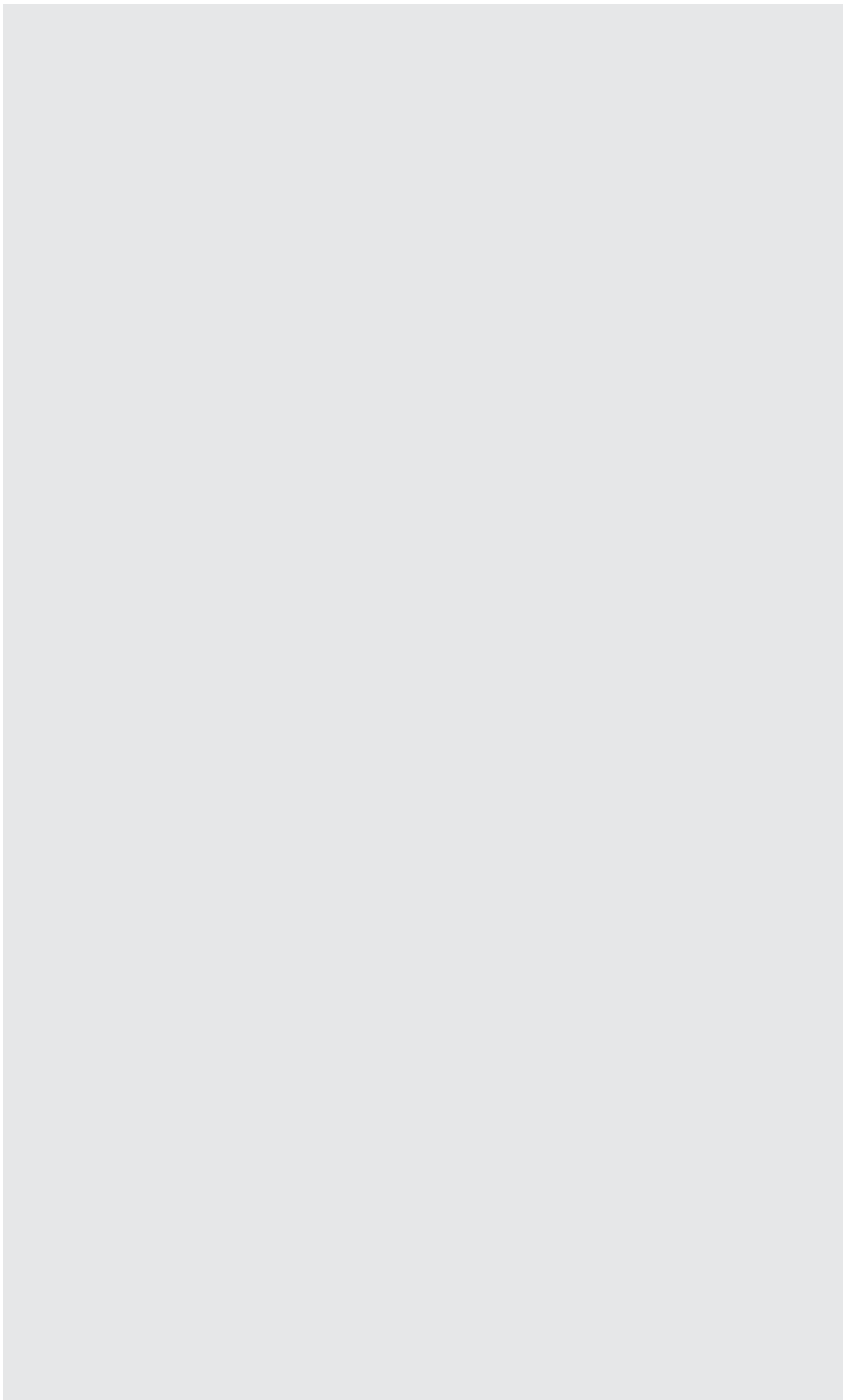
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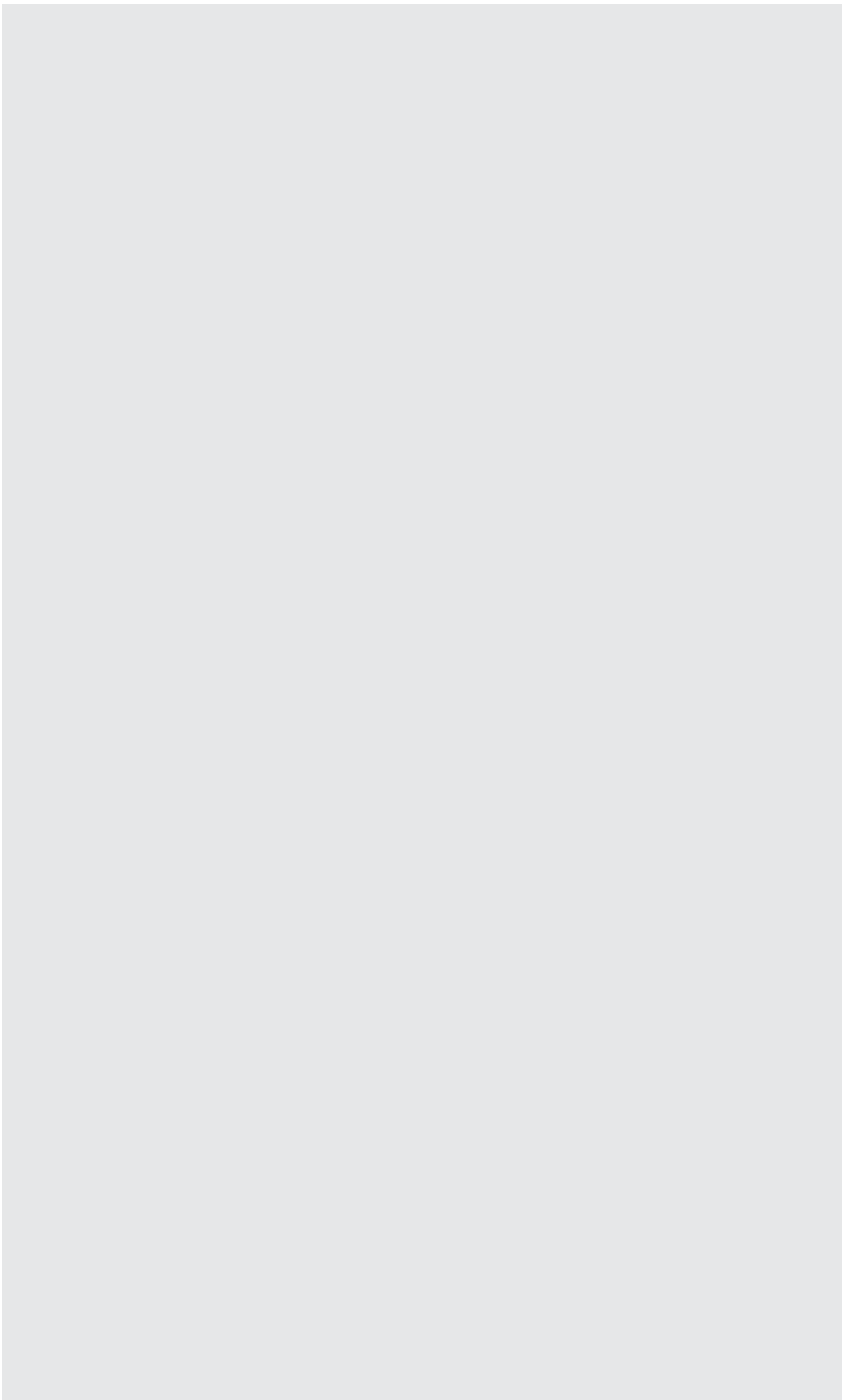
Whitney Davis, "Erotic Revision in Thomas Eakins's Narratives of Male Nudity," *Art History: Journal of the Association of Art Historians* 17 (September 1994): 301-41. Excerpts, 301ff. Reprinted by permission.



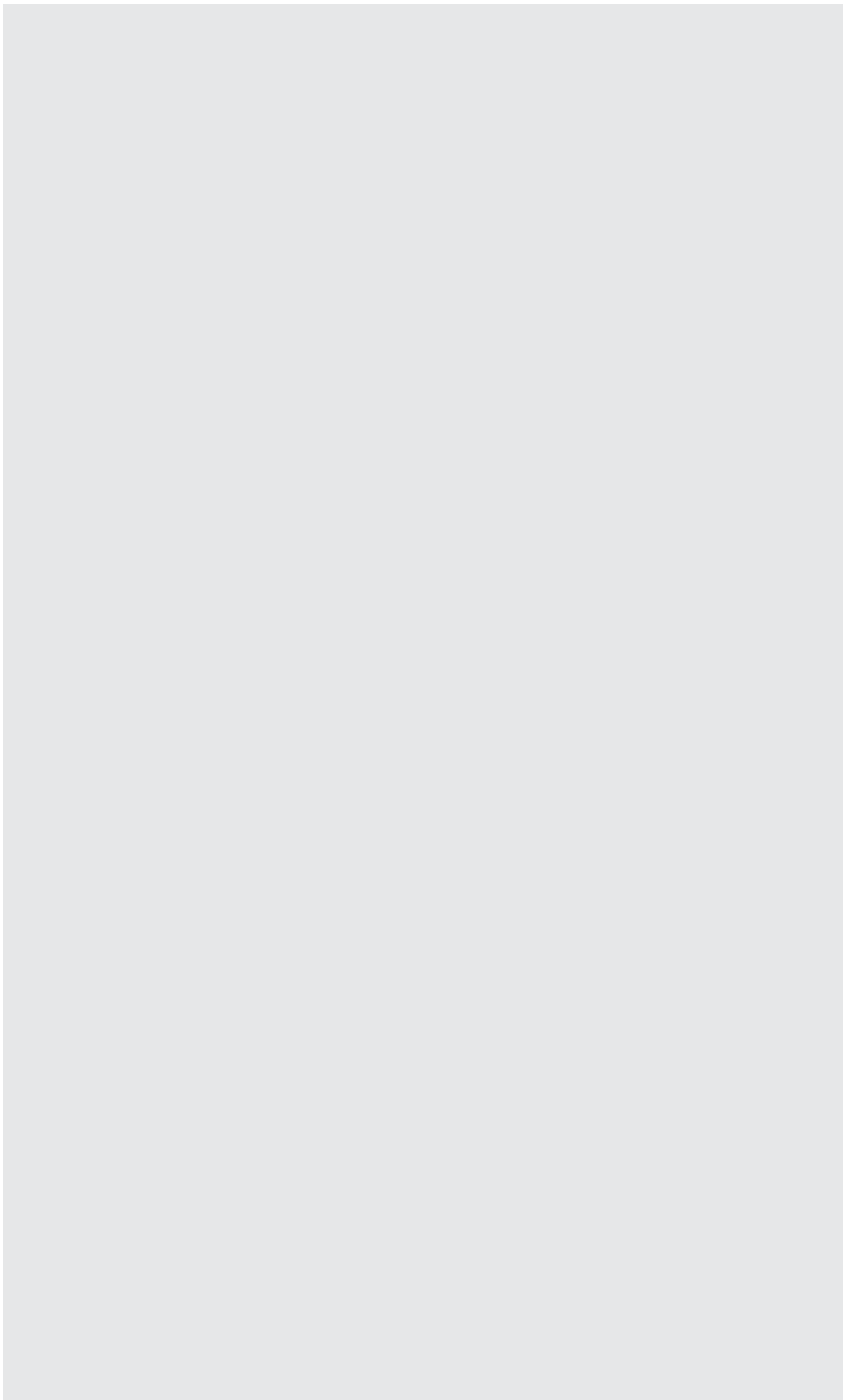


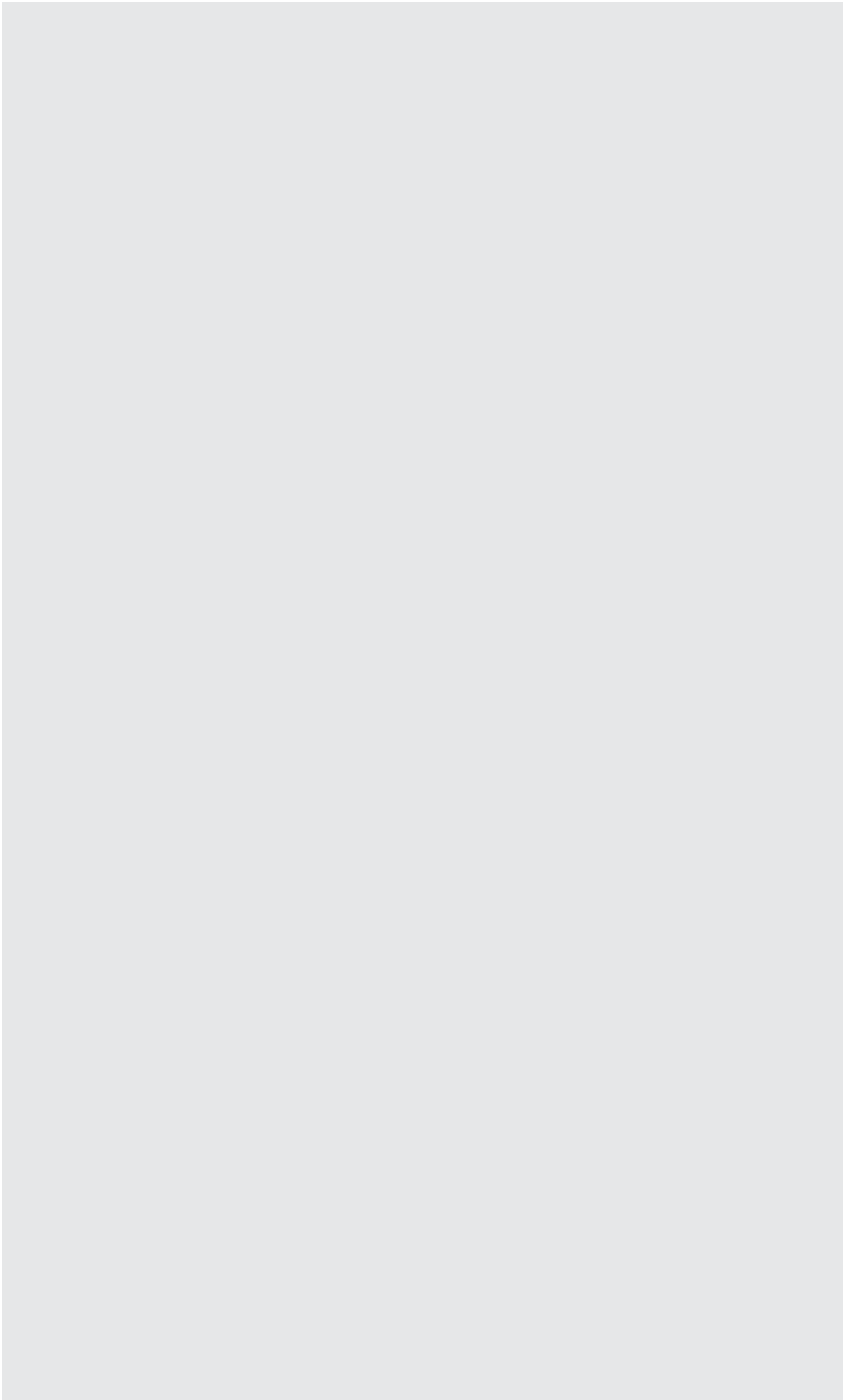


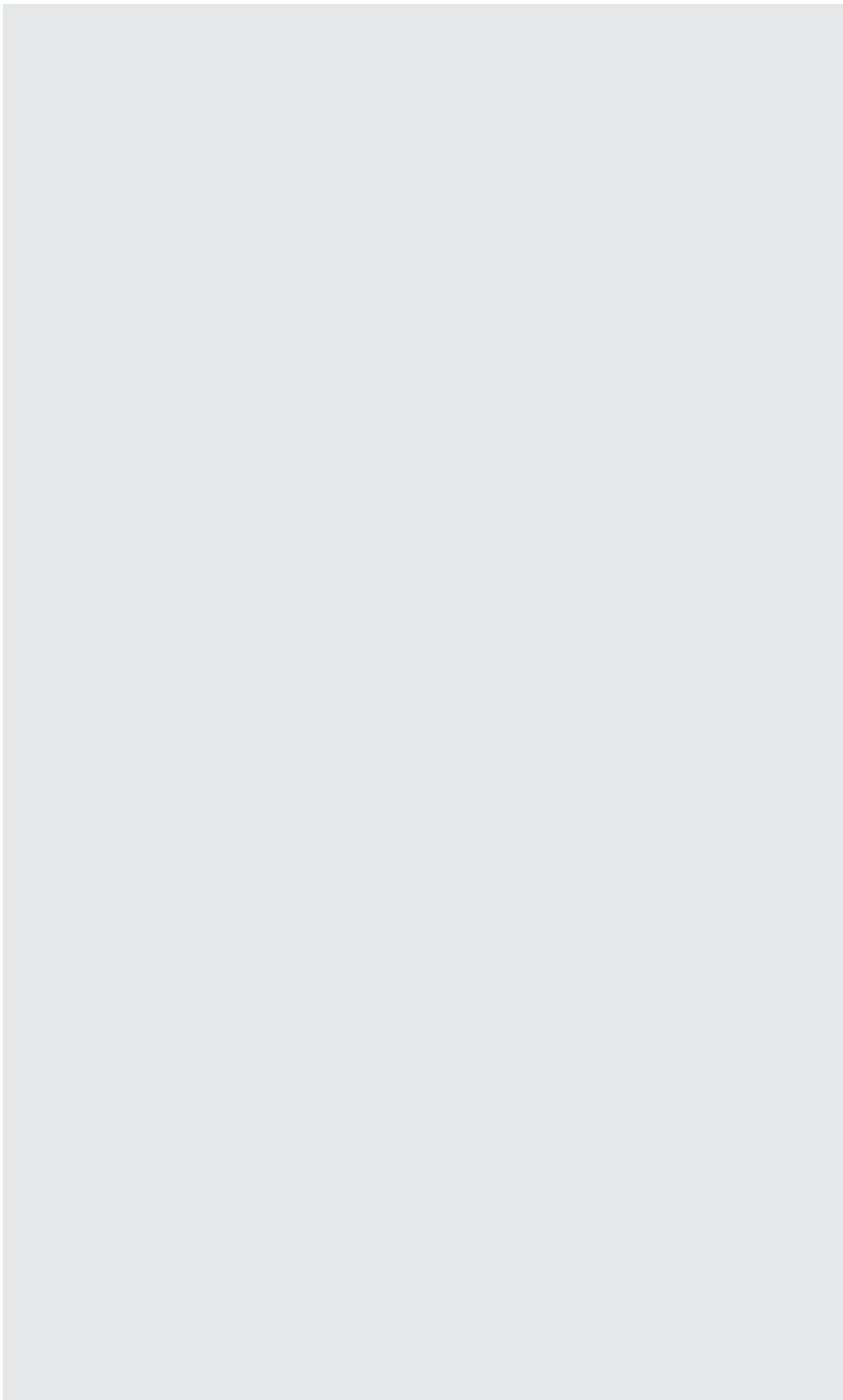


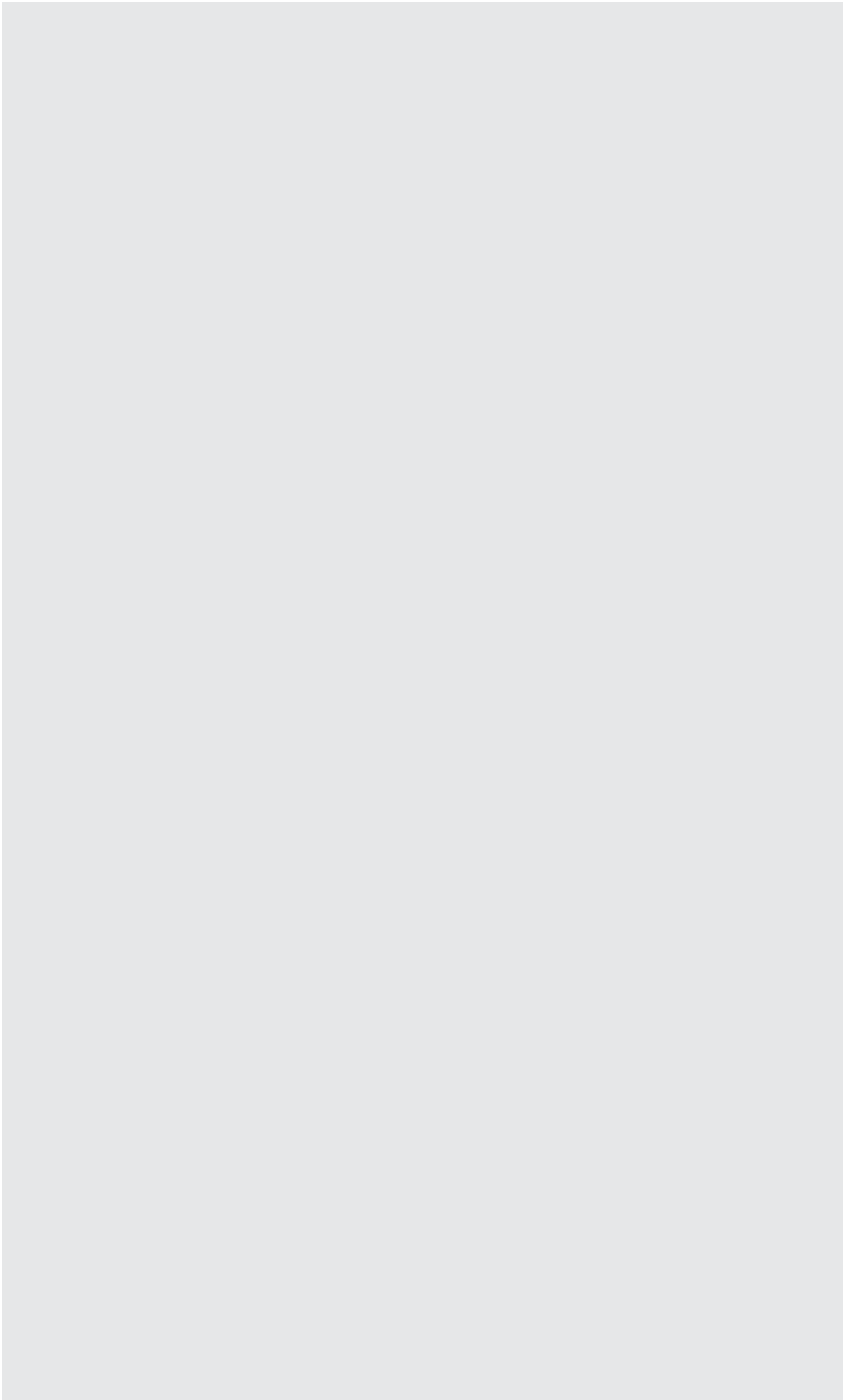


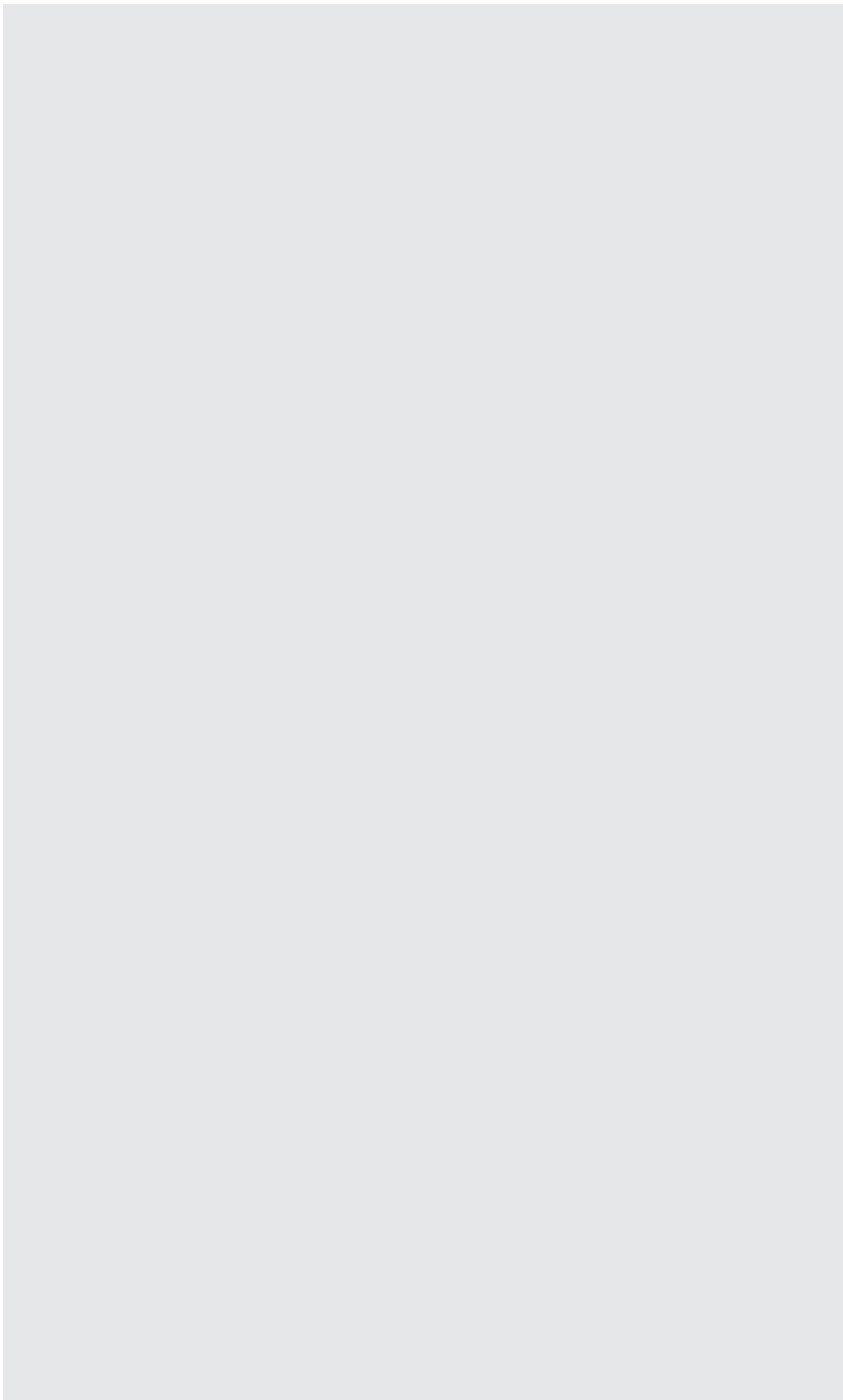


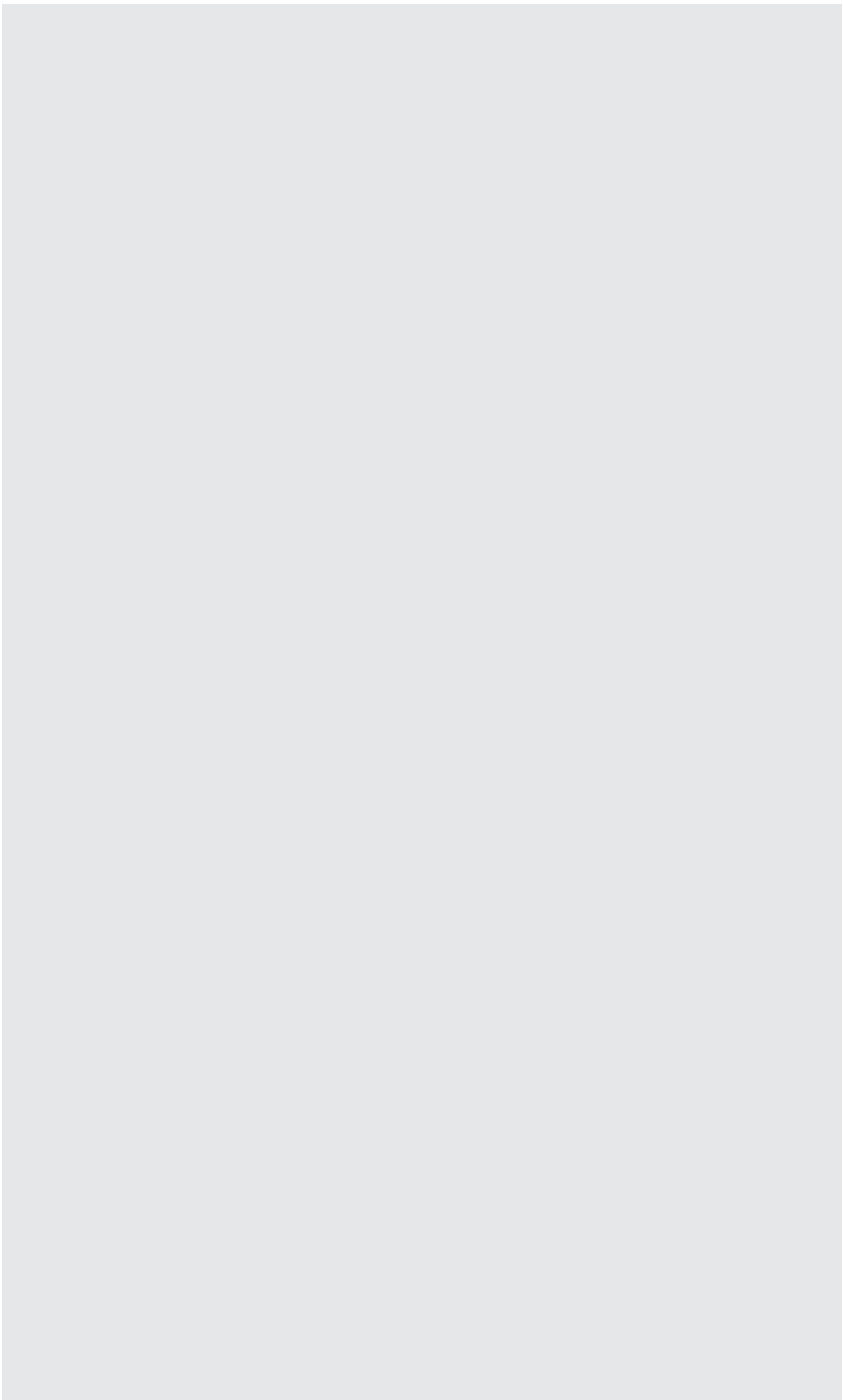


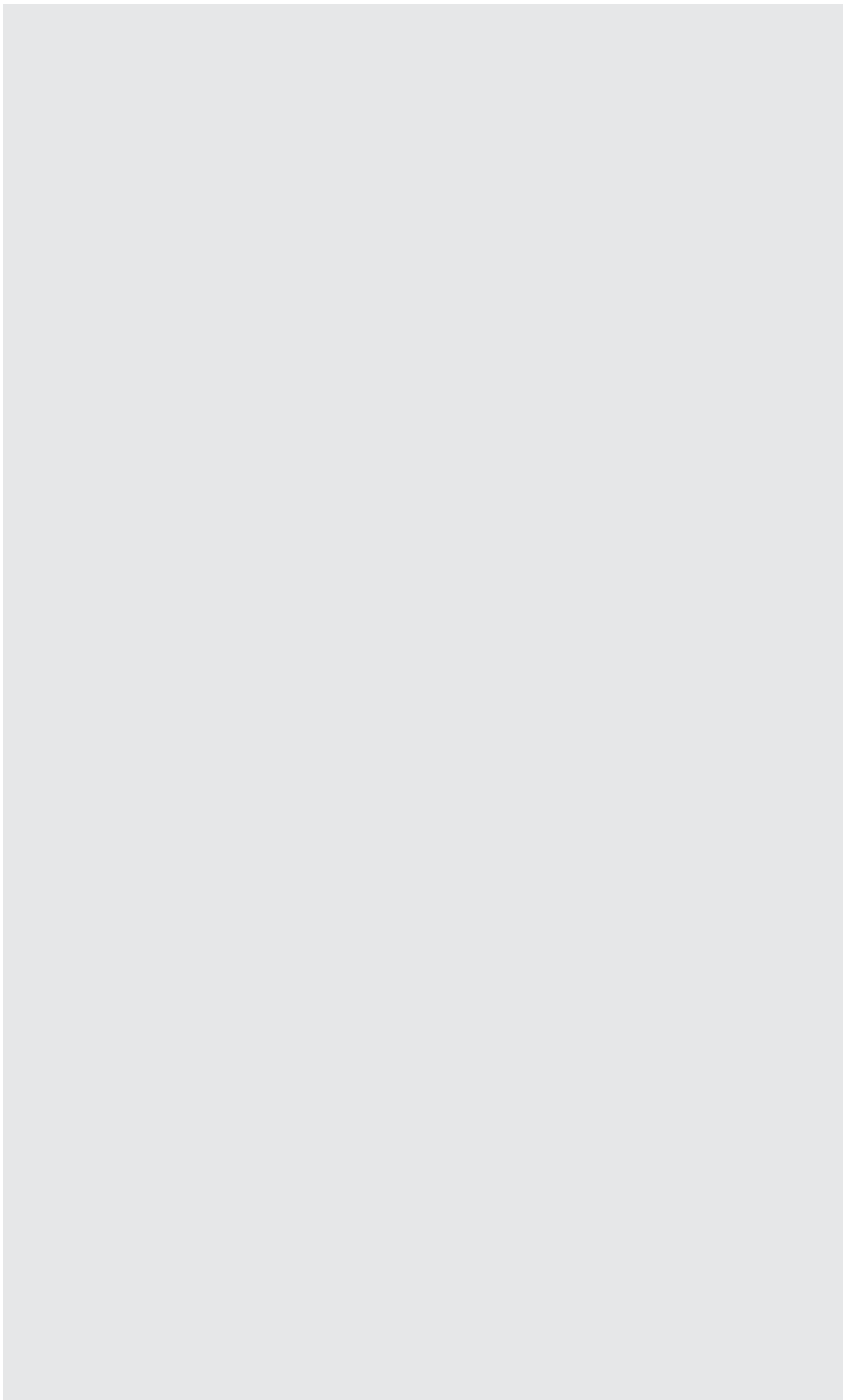


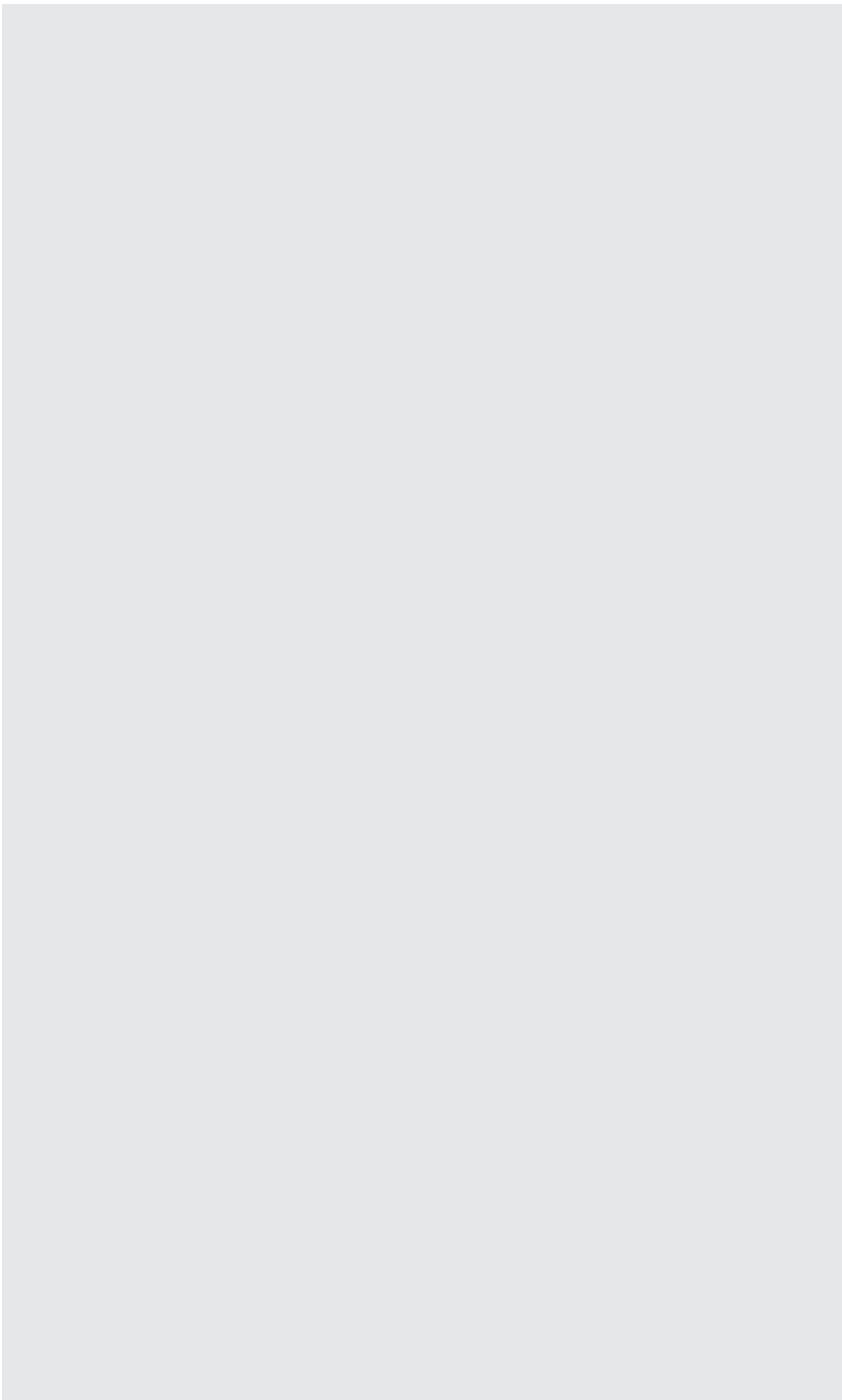




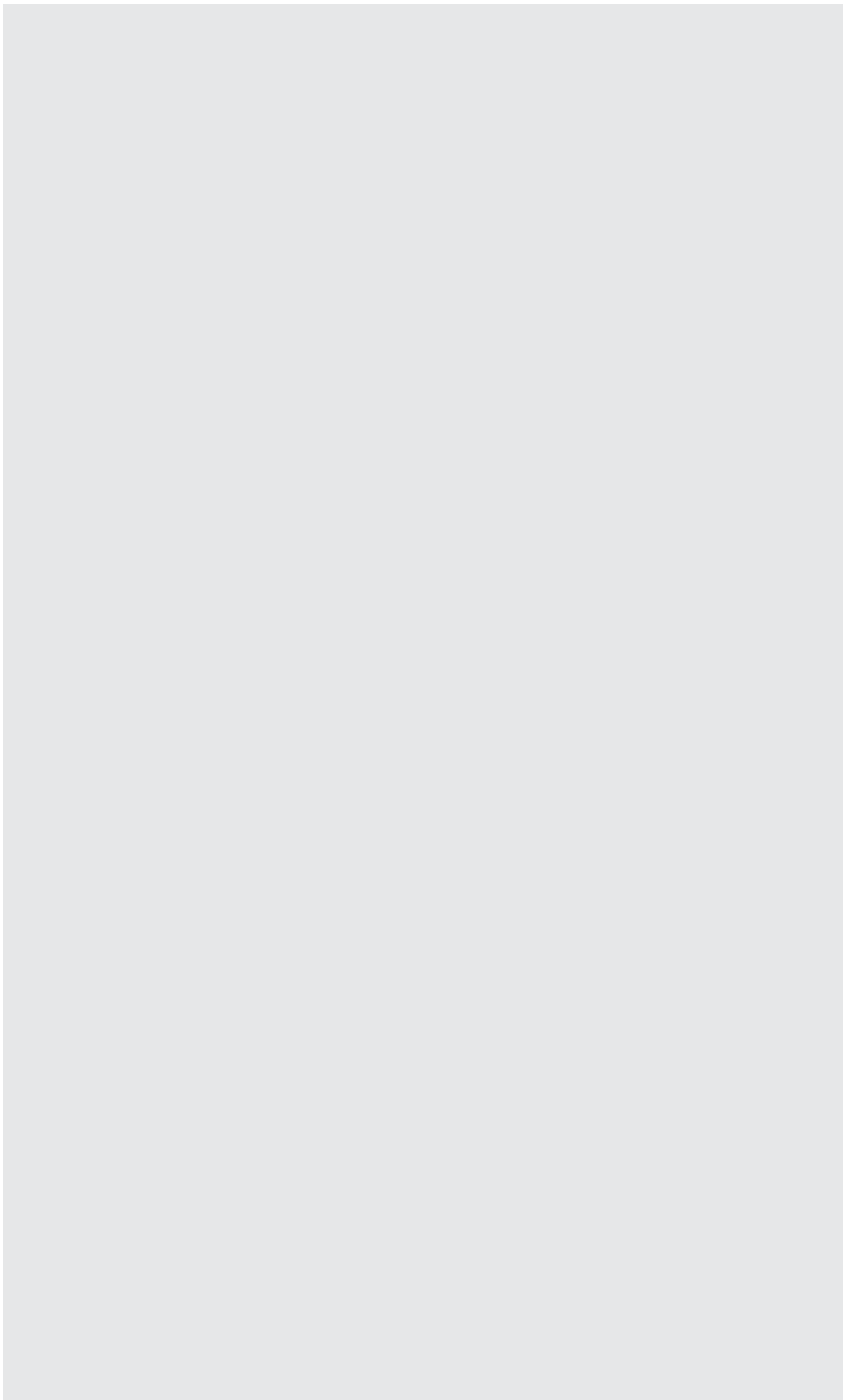


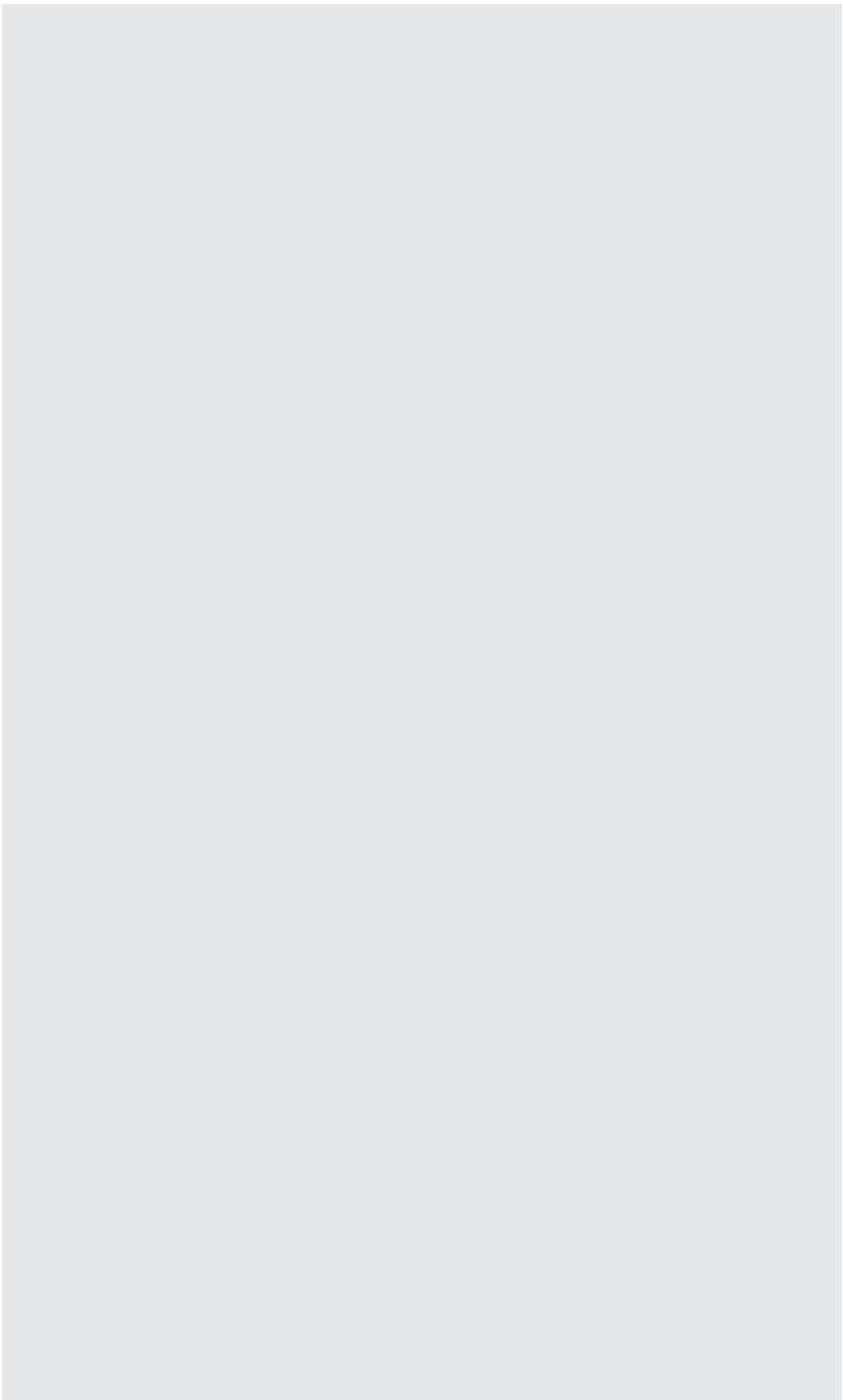


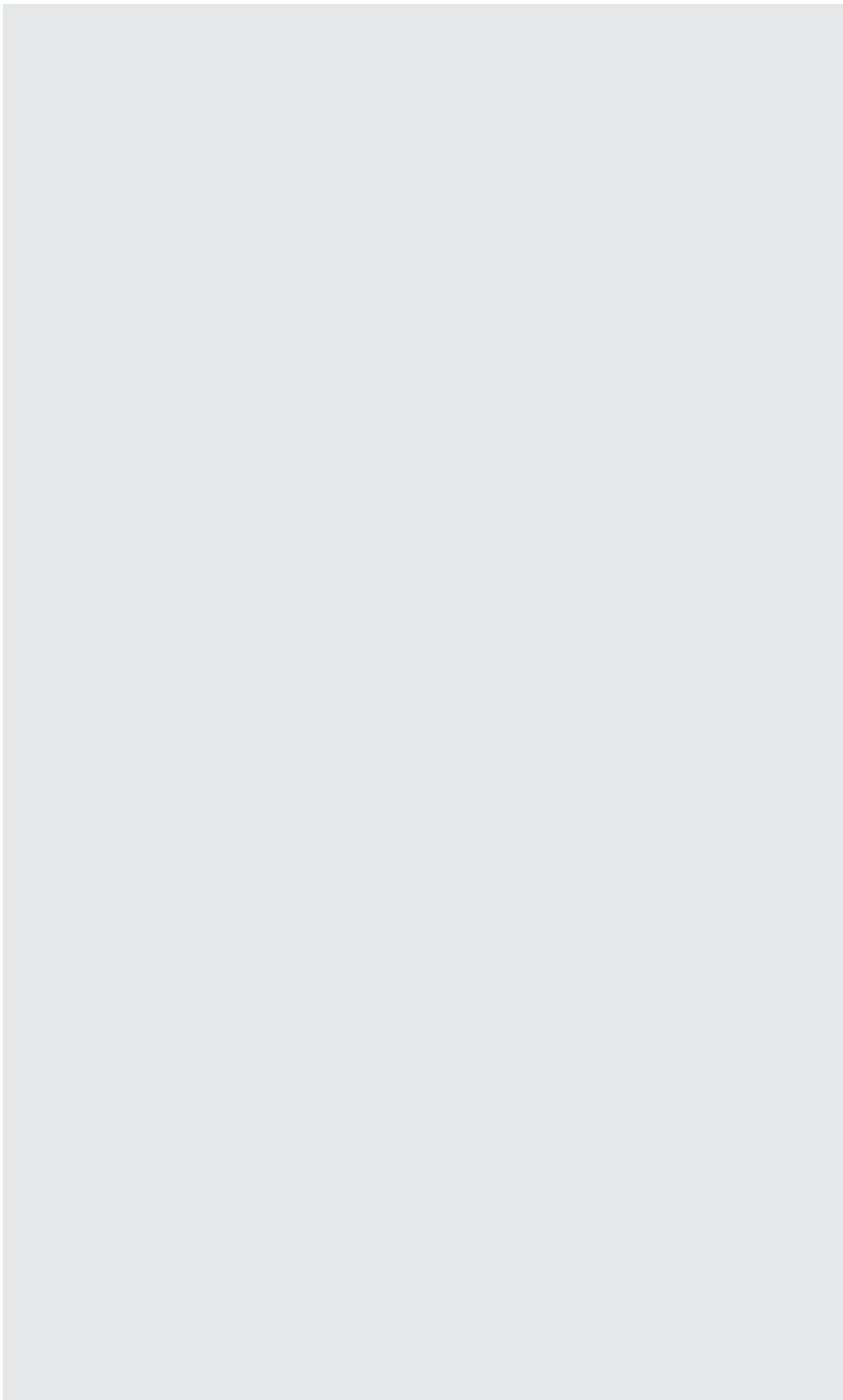


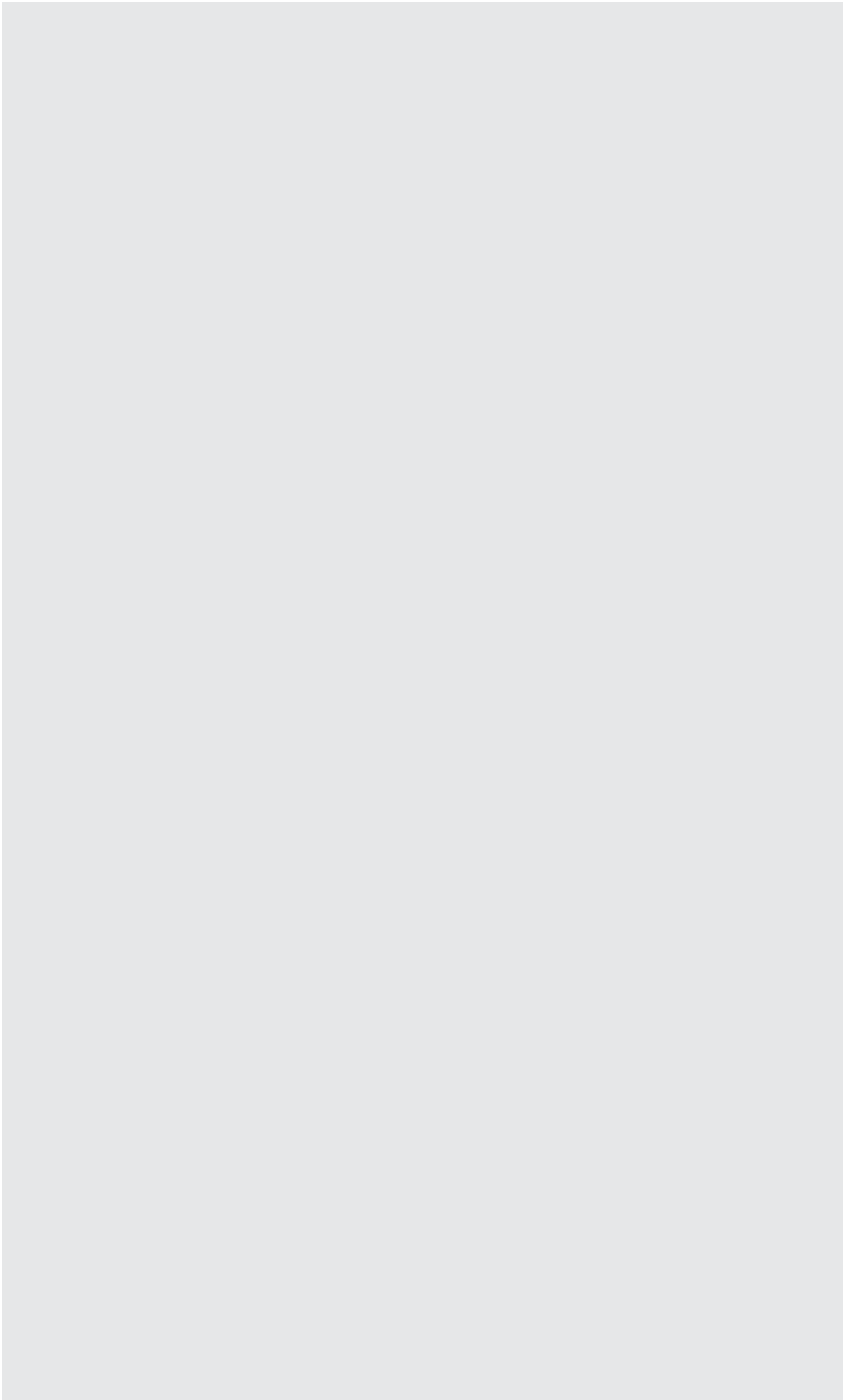


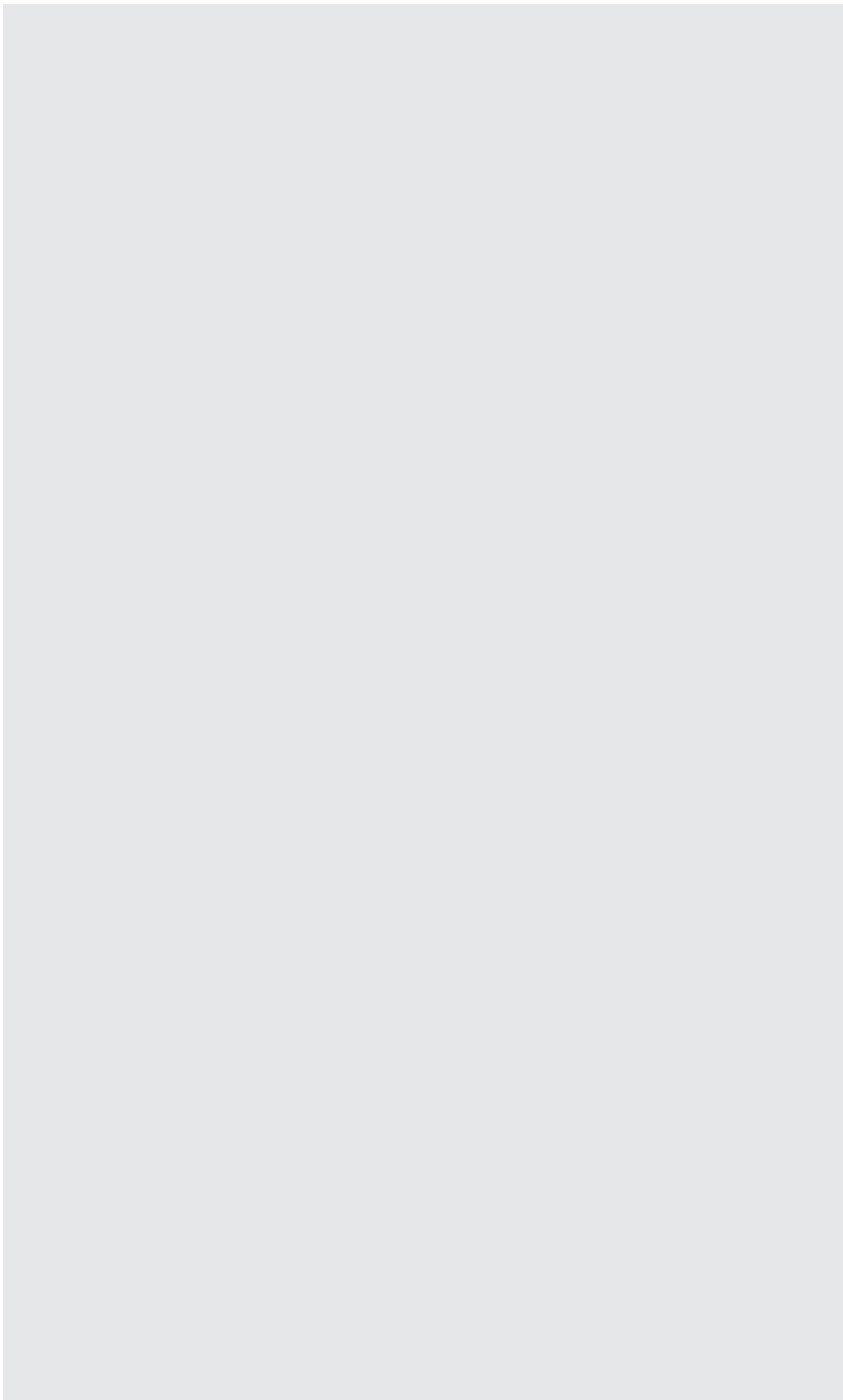












# **Fine Art and the Sweet Science: On Thomas Eakins, His Boxing Paintings, and Turn-of-the-Century Philadelphia**

MARJORIE ALISON WALTER, 1995

## **Introduction**

In the late 1890s, after attending a number of professional boxing matches at a popular public arena, Thomas Eakins produced three large-scale, ambitious paintings for which boxing serves as the nominal subject matter. *Taking the Count* (Yale University Art Gallery) and *Salutat* (Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy), both completed in 1898, and *Between Rounds* (Philadelphia Museum of Art), from the following year, aggressively encourage the viewer to explore the turn-of-the-century American urban environment in which they were created. An examination of that cultural context can enrich our understanding of the paintings themselves, as well as flesh out certain aspects of the artist's already well-known biography. Yet considering the popularity of Eakins and his works as subjects for historians of American art, surprisingly little has been written about these three paintings. None of the artist's biographers has delved beyond the most basic facts of the paintings' physical appearance, content and circumstances of creation.<sup>1</sup> In her study of Eakins as a chronicler of modern heroes, Elizabeth Johns mentions the boxing paintings only in passing, and then as either portraits or "scenes of leisure."<sup>2</sup> Several years before Johns's book was published, Carl Smith devoted an entire article to the paintings, in which he offered some thought-provoking and original observations.<sup>3</sup> Smith glosses over some of the more complicated aspects of these works, however, including issues of class, audience, and gender. His uncritical (and primary)

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Marjorie Alison Walter, "Fine Art and the Sweet Science: On Thomas Eakins, His Boxing Paintings, and Turn-of-the-Century Philadelphia," Ph.D. dissertation, University of California at Berkeley, 1995. Excerpts, pp. 1-5, 130-65. © 1995 by Marjorie A. Walter. Courtesy of the author.

reliance on standard secondary sources (i.e., the early monographs) results in the reader learning little new about the individuals depicted in these works, the building in which they are set, or the larger physical and cultural context in which they were created. Most importantly, we gain no insight into the paintings' striking commentary on late nineteenth-century cultural and spatial hierarchies.

One of the most perceptive assessments of the three boxing paintings comes from cultural historian Elliott Gorn, who describes Thomas Eakins as having "cut through romantic conventions to paint anatomically impeccable forms, men of dignified strength in a violent and painful world."<sup>4</sup> Gorn fails to acknowledge Eakins's own brand of romanticism, but he points out astutely the confrontational nature of *Taking the Count*, *Between Rounds* and *Salutat* by arguing that in painting them, Thomas Eakins was using boxing "as a symbol of rebellion against genteel conventions."<sup>5</sup> Though he does not develop this idea, with it Gorn moves the paintings toward a rich analytical context. Eakins's boxing paintings do indeed confront Victorian social mores in a number of ways. . . . Equally important, though, is how these paintings serve as an invitation to the same society against which they purport to rebel. The well-entrenched myth of Eakins as an artist unwilling to court, or even accommodate, the Philadelphia art world is challenged by his boxing paintings, in which his attempt to do just that is apparent. But these three works also make up a very personal discourse on Eakins's own career and personal life. At the same time, they provide an effective way to explore the late nineteenth-century physical and cultural context in which they were created. . . . [A] boxing match (and Eakins's painterly take on the subject) may be understood not so much as an imitation, depiction, or expression of the culture in which it takes place, but rather as a "carefully prepared" example of that culture.<sup>6</sup> As such, these paintings deserve a more thorough and broad-ranging consideration than they have received thus far.

When Thomas Eakins painted and displayed *Taking the Count*, *Between Rounds* and *Salutat*, he brought together people from traditionally divergent social and intellectual spheres. Until he produced these works, the sport had been visually depicted primarily in prints and drawings that appeared in the popular press. In Eakins's paintings, art lovers and patrons who had never set foot in a boxing arena or perused scandal sheets like the *National Police Gazette*, with its extensive ring coverage and engraved illustrations, were introduced to fight fans, most of whom were unlikely to visit an

art gallery or museum during their leisure hours. Practitioners of the “manly art” entered a fine-art practitioner’s world. Eakins’s endeavors directed sportswriters and art critics onto intersecting journalistic paths. These figurative, and in some cases literal, introductions resulted in an unexpected social convergence that resonates throughout Eakins’s three completed boxing paintings.<sup>7</sup>

These works also illustrate a provocative spatial convergence. In the late nineteenth century the people of Philadelphia were transforming the city’s landscape radically, from the heterogeneous, multiple-use arrangement of space typical of the first half of the century to a segregated, hierarchical and specialized organization that would be well established by the early 1920s.<sup>8</sup> Created in Eakins’s studio, using actual fighters as models, set in an enormous arena, and exhibited in galleries, museums, and even gymnasiums, these works defy that spatial restructuring by bridging the ever-widening social and physical separations between and among work, home, performance, and recreational environments. . . .

## Part Two: Physical and Social Contexts

Moving around the city on foot, streetcar, or bicycle, Thomas Eakins had seen major changes in the public landscape of Philadelphia by the time he began painting the boxers, yet he referred to these changes rarely in his paintings. *Taking the Count*, *Between Rounds* and *Salutat* are Eakins’s only paintings in which he presents an identifiable interior public space, the Arena.<sup>9</sup> In so doing, he invites consideration of both the immediate structure itself, as well as the larger physical landscape in which it was located. Particularly relevant to this line of inquiry is the fact that the Philadelphia Arena was located diagonally across the street from the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, at the intersection of Broad and Cherry Streets. When *Between Rounds* and *Salutat* were hung in the Academy’s annual exhibitions, art viewers and patrons were transported across the street to the smoke-filled boxing arena, while Billy Smith and Ellwood McCloskey, along with their fans, were brought into the hallowed halls of the Academy. This metaphorical role reversal is complicated, however, by several additional facts. Some of the spectators Eakins painted into the Arena were already familiar with art-viewing and the Academy, as students or critics, while others may well never actually have attended a boxing match. And this provocative convergence of audiences and spaces extends to the circumstances of the paintings’ creation and the environment in which that took place, Eakins’s Chestnut Street studio. *Between Rounds* encourages a closer



examination of the studio and the home, the Academy and the Arena, and alternative recreational spaces, as well as their respective locations throughout the city of Philadelphia. In turn, this focus on urban spaces allows . . . exploration and analysis of . . . themes . . . surrounding socio-economic class, professionalism, labor, and masculinity, in terms of the cultural environments depicted in, referred to in, or otherwise relevant to all three paintings. Also key to understanding *Between Rounds* and the other two paintings is Eakins's stubborn resistance to the changing turn-of-the-century city, and his strong inclination toward old-fashioned spaces.

### Chapter 3. The Arena, The Academy, and the Center City at the Turn of the Century

With the exception of a few years of study in Europe and several months of recuperation in the Dakota territory, Thomas Eakins spent all of his nearly seventy-two years in the city of Philadelphia. . . . Within Philadelphia, he spent most of his time in a small area of the center city covering approximately fourteen square blocks, between Broad and 18th Streets, and Mount Vernon and Chestnut Streets. Despite repeated clashes with certain factions in the Philadelphia art world, he made no move to leave the city for New York or Europe, as had other Philadelphia-born artists. In fact, Eakins . . . remained in his childhood home, long after the neighborhood had become unfashionable. This begs certain questions: what was downtown Philadelphia like in the late nineteenth century, and what about it held Eakins there his entire life? *Between Rounds* offers a way to explore the urban context in which it was created, and suggests an explanation for Eakins's attachment to that social and physical milieu.

#### 3.1 BETWEEN ROUNDS: A VISUAL AND FACTUAL OVERVIEW

Begun in 1898 but not completed until 1899, *Between Rounds* is one of Eakins's most complex and visually unified compositions.<sup>10</sup> Though Eakins has reduced the size of his canvas substantially when compared with *Taking the Count*, he has broadened the painting's scope considerably. At 50 1/4 inches by 40 inches, the standard size for a half-length portrait, *Between Rounds* is barely one quarter the size of *Taking the Count*, yet the later painting gives us easily four times the objective information, and several additional ways of thinking about boxing and art-making in late nineteenth-century America. We observe this scene, not from the very edge of the ring as a second, but as a paying spectator. The round top of one of the short stanchions arranged in a circle around the ring and connected with rope is visible at the lower left edge of the canvas. This boundary marker indicates that we are

outside of the “inner ring,” but very close to the line between the participant’s space and the main spectators’ area; we are observing the action from the front of a floor-level box, the equivalent of the area occupied by the bearded, top-hatted gentleman and the dark-haired military man visible at eye level beyond the ring. If, as now, these “ringside” seats were the most expensive in the house, this viewpoint can be seen as the artist’s acknowledgement of the economic status of the usual audience for his paintings.

From this privileged vantage point, we are drawn by areas of bright pigment immediately to the middle ground of the composition, to the pale diagonal of the resting fighter. From the fighter’s body our gaze is directed toward the red-trimmed, fringed white towel, and secondarily to the standing figure who waves the towel with his outstretched arms. The viewer then moves on to the highlighted forehead and left hand of a dark-haired man, standing on the edge of the ring, outside the ropes, and leaning anxiously over the resting boxer. Competing for our attention, though, is the bright yellow poster accented with pure cadmium red letters located at the upper left edge of the canvas. Once we allow our eyes to move to that area, we will linger there for a few moments, reading the partially visible poster. The bright red letters draw our gaze first, and from them we cannot help but attempt to read the more subdued, reddish-brown lettering on the rest of the poster. The fact that only part of poster is visible adds to its ability to hold our attention, as we attempt to extrapolate the missing letters from the information we can see. From this area, our gaze falls downward, through the uniformed policeman, and diagonally across the lower left quadrant of the canvas to the largest figure in the composition, the black-suited timer, whose bright, painstakingly-modelled hands create a secondary area of arresting high value.

Through his use of color, light and form, Eakins encourages this initial sequence of observation, from the center to the right and around the composition in a counterclockwise fashion. This scanning pattern allows the viewer to take in the whole, while at the same time inviting subsequent travels around the canvas to pick up the myriad details of a night at the Arena that Eakins has included. While the boxer may be at rest, the viewer of the painting, and the spectator in whose role the viewer is placed, is unable to find a place of repose. Our restless gaze coheres neatly with the moment Eakins has presented to us. Throughout the course of a round, each spectator would be focused intently on the two fighters in the ring; during the interlude between rounds, the fans’ attention is diffused and they are free to “move” about the interior. Eakins has created thereby a painting whose subject is arguably the most physically demanding of sports, and has presented it in

such a way that the physical action, both in and out of the ring, has been essentially stilled. The viewer is then forced to engage in a vigorous visual exercise to apprehend the painting fully.

We are reminded, though, that in a short time the action will shift, from the visual exercise on the part of the viewer to the intensely physical contest of the fight. Eakins has suggested this renewed activity with the second's towel, a loosely painted patch of white that represents the only real physical action in the entire painting. Eakins has shown the free edge of the towel doubled back on itself, indicating that the man holding it is whipping it in a downward motion, and that he is waving it vigorously, with a brisk snap at the apex of the movement. That Eakins chose to limit his depiction of motion to this waving towel makes sense. When one waves a towel, one is engaging in a repetitive motion that progresses logically and sequentially through a series of forms. Barring interference from strong winds, the fabric will behave similarly each time it is swung upward, as it reaches the top of the motion, and as it snaps back down; this is precisely the type of rapid, repetitive motion that Eakins had spent so much time examining in the mid-1880s.

During 1884 and 1885, Eakins assisted Eadweard Muybridge with his "Animal Locomotion" studies at the University of Pennsylvania, and also performed his own studies. . . . Though Eakins concentrated on the locomotion of the human body, the same principles of repetition and sequential action apply to a waving piece of cloth, the movement of which could have been captured with equal effectiveness by [Etienne-Jules] Marey's technique.

This is not the case, however, with the kind of action typically observable in a boxing ring. In fact, Eakins had explored that challenging subject photographically as early as 1883.<sup>11</sup> There are at least four known photographs showing six or seven nude young men, presumably Eakins's students, gathered in a forest clearing; two box (with padded gloves) while the others sit or recline in the grass around them, watching the two spar.<sup>12</sup> Each boxer's left fist is blurred, indicating that each is either completing or just beginning to throw a punch. These photographs reveal the challenge of capturing the action of the ring. The sport is made up of a combination of movements that will change situationally, unlike a jumping man, who will proceed through the same series of small movements to create the whole action each time he undertakes a jump. The boxer is reacting continually to his opponent's footwork and punches, and is also initiating sequences of action in a nearly infinite number of combinations. The painterly approach required to capture this type of action was incompatible with Eakins's style, so he chose to present a moment during the bout where that action was

stilled. In *Between Rounds* he has avoided the stiffness of *Taking the Count* by confining the suggestion of action to the waving towel and pulling back from the ring, thereby allowing the viewer's necessarily active gaze to bring the composition to life.

Eakins's long view of the Arena interior in *Between Rounds* piques the viewer's curiosity about the building itself. The setting for *Between Rounds* was a large, circular brick building with a seating capacity of 3,700.<sup>13</sup> This structure had been erected on the northeast corner of Broad and Cherry Streets in 1886, and was designed originally to house Paul Philippoteaux's cyclorama painting of the battle of Gettysburg, which opened in February of that year.<sup>14</sup> *The Battle of Gettysburg* was not Philadelphia's first encounter with this form of entertainment, as ten years earlier a similar structure, the Colosseum, had been erected in the city at the southeast corner of Broad and Locust Streets (across from the Academy of Music) to exhibit a forty-thousand-square-foot canvas entitled *Paris by Night*.<sup>15</sup> The Colosseum had been built in New York in 1873, but had been disassembled and moved to Philadelphia in time for the Centennial Exposition. Constructed of corrugated iron over an iron framework, the circular building was one hundred fifty feet across and eighty feet high to the top of its cornice. When it was erected in Philadelphia, a tower and observation deck were added, giving patrons the promised "Bird's Eye View" of the city. The Colosseum's success was short-lived, however, and by the time the Broad and Cherry Cyclorama opened for business, the iron building had been removed and John Wanamaker had built stables on the site.<sup>16</sup> The brick and mortar structure at the intersection of Broad and Cherry Streets was of a more permanent nature, so after approximately four years as a cyclorama (*The Battle of Gettysburg* was followed by *Jerusalem on the Day of the Crucifixion* in 1888), the building found new life as a boxing arena and old-fashioned one-ring circus.<sup>17</sup>

The Cyclorama building was well-suited to its new function as a boxing venue, when under the auspices of the Philadelphia Athletic Club it became known simply as the Arena.<sup>18</sup> It accommodated its several thousand spectators on at least two separate raised tiers of seats and additional seating on the main floor, as is clear in both *Between Rounds* and *Taking the Count*. By virtue of its circular design, no one attending a program at the building was relegated to a distant corner, and with the exception of those occupying seats located behind structural columns, several of which are visible in the paintings, each spectator would have enjoyed a clear view of the centrally situated ring.

The beholder of *Between Rounds* also has a choice view of the Arena's ring. . . . At least one sportswriter who had had extensive experience covering the ring in a variety of locales claimed that there "isn't a better boxing place in the world than [the] Arena."<sup>19</sup>

Boxing probably began at this popular venue in 1892, and continued until May of 1899, when "the cyclorama entitled 'The Battle of Manila Bay' restored the pristine glory of the Cyclorama Bldg."<sup>20</sup> That pristine glory was short-lived, as after several months the Winter Circus re-emerged and occupied the building until it was torn down to make way for the Lyric Theatre, which opened in 1905.<sup>21</sup> . . .

During the last few years of the nineteenth century . . . though, the northeast corner of Broad and Cherry was a popular place of sporting entertainment. Based on newspaper accounts, a program of five six-round bouts, like those we see listed on the partially visible poster in *Between Rounds*, took place nearly every week, generally on Friday evenings. Preliminary bouts usually involved smaller fighters, and in at least one instance, the evening began with children, with "5-year-old John and 6-year-old Willie Pearce in a boxing sketch."<sup>22</sup> The headline bout, known as the "wind-up," always took place last. In the case of the Joe Walcott-Tommy West match that took place on the night referred to in *Between Rounds*, the featured fight did not begin until nearly 11:00 p.m.<sup>23</sup> These wind-ups generally matched heavier fighters (Walcott and West fought as welterweights), often those well-known in the boxing fraternity.<sup>24</sup>

In *Between Rounds*, Eakins has included many small details of a night at the Arena in its heyday. . . . The timer for that evening's bouts was Eakins's friend Clarence Cranmer, who is shown intently focused on the stopwatch in his left hand. The roles of the seconds, here played by Ellwood McCloskey, who leans over the ropes to offer advice, and Billy McCarney (or perhaps Billy McLean), who waves the towel, are well-described. In addition to the towel, Eakins has included a miniature still-life of the boxer's between-rounds accoutrements: the cut lemon, brass bucket, sponge and bottles (of water and perhaps whiskey), one in the bucket and the other grasped in McCloskey's beefy left hand.<sup>25</sup>

The same theater posters hanging from the upper balcony in *Taking the Count* are visible in this painting, though Eakins has moved them closer together and to a different location within the arena. Because Eakins has pulled back from the ring to offer a broader view of the interior space, less of the posters' detail is visible. Like *Taking the Count*, *Between Rounds* depicts a specific date, bout and identifiable individuals, and unlike journalistic

illustration, the title of the painting does not spell out those facts for the viewer. Rather, those who do not recognize the fighters must identify them and the match from clues the artist has included on the canvas, combined with research in external sources. The theater advertisements, for plays that opened on April 11 and April 18 of 1898, are helpful, but are no longer required for purposes of dating the bout depicted. The longer view of the space in *Between Rounds* allows us to see about two-thirds of a poster on which the fight program for the evening in question, "Apr. 22," is listed.

First in the ring that evening was a pair of bantamweights, Kid Madden (or Maddern), of Fairmount, and Frank Fisher. . . . Next up was Ellwood McCloskey, who by this time was blind in one eye and well-known to the Arena crowd, in a bout with Harry Berger, described by the *Press* as controversial. . . . After that excitement, things slowed down with Jack Smith, of Norfolk, and Martin Judge, who "was willing to make things interesting," but Smith did not oblige. All in all, it was a "slow affair of the kind calculated to make the sports feel sore at themselves for looking at it."<sup>26</sup> The semi-windup featured Billy Smith, the boxer depicted by Eakins resting between rounds, and Tim Callahan. This match had been awaited eagerly by the local fans, and it did not disappoint:

Tim Callahan and Billy Smith, the very clever 115 pounders, appeared in the semi-windup. The contest was a very clever one, in which both displayed a great deal of science. It was an even thing until the last round, in which Callahan had slightly the better of affairs.<sup>27</sup>

The final bout of the evening was an especially exciting one, pitting well-known welterweights, Tommy West and Joe Walcott against each other. . . . With the exception of the reference he made to it with the yellow poster, Eakins ignored this headline fight and concentrated instead on the preceding bout between the featherweights, Smith and Callahan. And unlike *Taking the Count*, this painting avoids addressing the confrontational nature of the sport by leaving Smith's eventually victorious opponent out of the picture altogether. In offering the viewer of the painting the Arena interior as he has done, Eakins instead focused on the fight and the building in which it took place as integral parts of the late nineteenth-century center city landscape.

### 3.2 ARENA AND ACADEMY: A SHARED NEIGHBORHOOD

The Arena's assertion of itself as a place of entertainment was hardly confined to its interior trappings. The building attracted attention with its

unusual octagonal shape, stark white walls, boldly contrasting red roof, and decorative moldings. The structure was further enlivened by colorful, striped awnings and fluttering flags, including the American flag at the top of the pole. The flag pole perched atop an enclosed fire escape tower, from which black wrought iron exterior fire escape stairways and walkways extended across the western face of the building. The grand, three-tiered entryway was punctuated by columns and round arches, and topped by a grand neo-classical statue, a nod to high culture. The words "Winter Circus," painted in enormous red letters on the exterior of the building to the left of the entrance, loudly announced the structure to passersby.

The Arena/Circus did not occupy its site in isolation. The southwest corner of the same intersection was home to the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, which had been completed in 1876, and from which Eakins had been forced to resign ten years later. In the waning years of the nineteenth century, the Arena presented Philadelphians, especially the unceremoniously ousted Eakins, a striking low-brow alternative to its high-brow neighbor across the intersection. During this late-century period of urban transformation, such aesthetic contrasts were not limited to this particular place, or even to Philadelphia. For example, in New York City in 1900, the elite ideal of Madison Square's Dewey Arch competed for the attention of passersby, particularly at night, with a colossal, flashing green pickle that topped the electrically-lit sign listing several of the "57 varieties" produced by the Heinz company that stood across the square.<sup>28</sup>

Of course, like the Dewey Arch, Frank Furness's Pennsylvania Academy building is by no means a subdued structure. Rich in textures and decorative features, the building is also polychromatic, though unlike the superficial color of the Winter Circus building, the Academy's color is integral, resulting from juxtaposition of different structural building materials, including red brick, brownstone, light limestone, and black brick. Frank Furness was only five years older than Eakins, and already an established talent in the Philadelphia architectural community when he designed the Academy building. . . . Furness's style is idiosyncratic, combining aspects of a variety of architectural currents. High Victorian Gothic, the theoretical basis for which was provided by John Ruskin in his 1849 opus, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, is visible in the Philadelphian's works in their polychromy and truthful use of materials. Also apparent is the influence of "neo-grec" French architects Henri Labrouste and E. E. Viollet-le-Duc in Furness's penchant for exaggerating the structural roles of various elements with fat, compressed columns and thick, flattened arches.<sup>29</sup> In the Academy

building we even see a nod to the Second Empire Baroque that is embodied so forcefully in the nearby Philadelphia City Hall, with the doubled columns on its second level and the insistent symmetry of its facade.

The solid, didactic exterior of the Academy enclosed a facility designed by Furness to the specifications of the Academy's Building Committee, chaired by Fairman Rogers and including John Sartain, for the teaching of art and no other purpose. Even Thomas Eakins had been consulted in the effort to make the building as functional as possible.<sup>30</sup> It included a library, dissecting room, lecture hall, print and cast rooms, and extensive studios and galleries, all designed to receive maximum natural light from skylights. The life drawing studio was the largest in the nation at the time.<sup>31</sup> Despite being uniquely suited to its purpose, at the time it was built the Academy building was criticized widely. Detractors felt it looked too much like a railway station or a market building, and one local newspaper specifically criticized its stylistic eclecticism by stating that "many features are incongruous to the point of absurdity."<sup>32</sup>

One wonders what the Academy's architectural critics must have thought of the Cyclorama building done up in its Winter Circus colors. Like the Academy, that building had been designed specifically for a single purpose: the display of an enormous panoramic painting in a setting that would allow the viewer to feel transported from the city of Philadelphia to the battlefield at Gettysburg or to Jerusalem on the day of the crucifixion. Yet, within a few years of its construction, the structure was put to other uses, as the Colosseum had been before it. The building was transformed from a space for the display of art to a space for the display of athletic prowess and masculine aggression, while the Academy remained exclusively an institution for the display and teaching of the fine arts.

The neighborhood that the Academy and the Arena shared was as eclectic as the former structure's architectural style, or the variety of entertainment offered at the latter building. The trend toward homogenization of the cityscape in the surrounding blocks was, however, unmistakable. Thomas Eakins would have been keenly aware of these changes, as he passed through the neighborhood more often than just on fight nights. In fact, by the time he began painting the boxers in 1898, the artist had walked along Broad Street practically every day of his adult life. From his home at 1729 Mount Vernon Street, Eakins probably walked the three blocks east to Broad Street, then south along Broad to reach many of his regular destinations. As early as 1864, he began studying anatomy at Jefferson Medical College, several blocks south of Market Street and east of Broad.<sup>33</sup> After returning from his years of



training in Paris, the young artist resumed his anatomy studies in 1873, and a year later, he began teaching evening drawing classes at the Philadelphia Sketch Club, whose “Bohemian habitat” was located at 201 South Eleventh Street, three blocks east of Broad and two blocks south of Market Street.<sup>34</sup> Eakins continued teaching these evening classes until 1876, when the new Pennsylvania Academy building opened and he began work as an unpaid assistant to the professor of drawing and painting. For the next decade, until his forced resignation in 1886, Eakins was a fixture at the Academy. Even after 1886, though, Eakins’s nearly daily walks (and later, perhaps, bicycle rides) down Broad Street and past the site of his public humiliation continued, as he had rented a studio at 1330 Chestnut Street, half a block east of Broad, in 1884. Though not exactly scenic, the walk from his Mount Vernon Street home to these destinations took Eakins through a mixed urban landscape typical of the late nineteenth century. Over the years, the route also confronted the artist with the inexorable evolution of Philadelphia’s old, mixed-use downtown into a new, more homogenized, modern city.

The heavily industrial block of Broad Street between Callowhill and Spring Garden was, compared to the rest of Eakins’s route, relatively stable. It was occupied by the nationally famous and ever-growing Baldwin Locomotive Works, which had been founded in 1831. The Works included rail and freight yards, several machine shops, and corporate offices. Baldwin was the country’s premier locomotive manufacturer, and one of the largest employers in the nation at the turn of the century. In 1900, Baldwin employed between 8,000 and 10,000 workers; though smaller than Carnegie Steel, Baldwin was larger than either General Electric’s Schenectady, New York plant or Chicago’s Armour meatpacking operations.<sup>35</sup>

A large number of Baldwin’s employees would have been machinists, traditionally independent, well-paid, and in great demand. These men had the leisure time and money to spend on entertainment, and very likely would have enjoyed many evenings of boxing at the Arena, just a few blocks south of the Works. In turn, Baldwin’s plant may have been a leisure-time attraction for other Philadelphians. Like they are by Boeing’s aircraft operations today, turn-of-the-century Americans were fascinated by locomotives and their manufacture. At the Centennial Exposition, Baldwin exhibited eight locomotives, and sent two to Paris for the Exposition of 1900.<sup>36</sup> Baldwin also published “catalogs,” complete with photographs and drawings, listing every locomotive it had built and describing company operations. In 1923, Baldwin produced an illustrated history of the company.<sup>37</sup> Finished locomotives left Baldwin on tracks, as a number of rail tracks for the Philadelphia and

Reading Railway crossed Broad at Pennsylvania Avenue (west of Broad) and Noble Street (east of Broad).<sup>38</sup> These behemoths lumbering through the urban core would have added danger, noise, and spectacle to the Philadelphian's walk down Broad Street.

Proceeding south along Broad Street beyond the locomotive works, Eakins would have observed particularly dramatic changes over the years in the blocks immediately north and south of Cherry Street. During Eakins's childhood, the east side of Broad Street between Cherry and Race consisted of a mix of structures, both architecturally and in terms of function. A watercolor painting from 1842 reveals that the block at that time typified the second wave of American city building, with the encroachment of large buildings taking over multiple eighteenth-century-sized lots. . . .

By the early 1890s the scale of the block had changed completely.<sup>39</sup> The Westchester Hotel and railroad office had been demolished in 1851 and replaced by the State Fencibles Armory, a six-story stone structure with a slate or metal roof that survives today.<sup>40</sup> The Sharpless building on the corner of Broad and Race was now occupied by a bicycle riding school and retail store. The building housing Buzby's flour shop mid-century was now home to a boiler converting factory. The remainder of the block finally had succumbed to the trend of multiple-lot building: the two empty lots, the wooden dwelling, and the tiny single-story curiosity shop had been replaced by the enormous cyclorama building.

The other side of the street was occupied by several large structures, and a few small enterprises, almost all of which were subject to a high fire danger.<sup>41</sup> These included the Nichols Horse & Carriage Bazaar, a structure that was nearly as large as the Arena directly across the street from it, a stable and farrier's shop around the corner on North Carlisle Street, a bicycle repair shop, a feed store, and a six-story industrial building housing a laundry (in the basement), several printing and engraving shops, and the Hirsch Brothers umbrella factory. The rest of the immediate area shared by the Arena and the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts likewise presented to the passerby a mix of dwellings; industrial, business, and civic structures; and cultural institutions.

North of Race Street, Broad was occupied by more industry, including factories for the production of carriages, cigars, gas lights, agricultural machinery and "trimmings."<sup>42</sup> The D. J. Gallagher printing house, at least two retail establishments selling flour and two others offering bicycles, and the "Vienna Model Bakery" also shared this block. A few small artisan's shops could be found among the factories; these included a sign maker, tinsmith, stained glass works and a chinaware decorator. Several small bar room/

dwelling combination structures remained on the northwest corner of Broad and Race, and almost all of the area north of Race and east of the alleyway (Goodwill Court) between Broad and Juniper was packed with small brick dwellings. The area would not have been a desirable place to live: noise, odors, vermin infestation and high risk of fire would have been part of life here, as along with the large and small industrial concerns, the block was home to several feed stores, livery stables, flour warehouses, and substantial lumber piles.<sup>43</sup> Rounding out this mix of structures was the large Hahnemann Homeopathic Hospital.

Anyone proceeding south on Broad Street beyond Cherry, however, would have noted a marked change in the types of structures facing the street. Aside from a small artificial limb factory and an equally modest bicycle repair shop, this block lacked places of employment for the industrial worker. An educational institution, the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, still anchors the southwest corner of the Broad and Cherry intersection; an institution of another kind, the Odd Fellows Hall, occupied the southeast corner of the intersection. Sharing the block with these imposing edifices were the First Baptist Church, the Columbia Hotel (four stories, with a bar room) and two insurance companies, the German American Title Insurance Company and the Fidelity Mutual Life Association. The next block, between Arch Street and City Hall, was dominated by the enormous and architecturally eclectic Masonic Temple, which had been built between 1868 and 1873 according to a design by James H. Windrim . . . and the Arch Street Methodist Church, completed a few years earlier than the Masonic Temple.<sup>44</sup>

To reach his studio, the Sketch Club or Jefferson Medical College, Eakins next would have had to skirt the site of Philadelphia's City Hall, which was located in a square at the intersection of Broad and Market Streets. He had many opportunities to view progress on the building, as construction of "The Temple of Philadelphia's Folly," as Republican leader and newspaperman Alexander McClure called it, began in 1871 and was not completed until 1901.<sup>45</sup> The final total cost topped \$25 million. . . .

The point of the preceding overview of Eakins's daily path through the city, and especially of the area around Broad and Cherry Streets, is to aid us in understanding the character of the neighborhood shared by the Arena and the Academy, and more importantly, the people who worked, lived, and regularly passed through it. These people could not help but notice the large white Arena at the northeast corner of Broad and Cherry. In addition to being visually striking, this building also stood out by virtue of its status as a place of public recreation (for its paying spectators) among structures devoted to labor, business, education, and private social interaction. To be sure, visiting

the annual exhibition at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts may be classified as a form of recreation, but one that took place for only a short time each year and appealed to a more limited, elite audience. The several bar rooms and saloons in the area were also places of leisure, and clearly were linked with the Arena, given the historical role played by drinking establishments and their proprietors in ring culture. These taverns would have served as convenient locations for men to gather, before the fights to bet, and after to discuss the evening's events. Yet these saloons were small and lacked the architecturally distinctive character of the Arena. The drinking and socializing that took place within them, unlike the events hosted by the nearby Arena, were rarely newsworthy. The Odd Fellows Hall, Masonic Lodge, and bicycle-riding school served social purposes as well, but these recreational opportunities were not open to all—one had to be a member of one of the fraternal organizations, or have at one's disposal the time and money to pursue cycling lessons. The Arena, though, cheerfully and loudly beckoned to all men in the neighborhood, and by virtue of its size was able to accommodate them all. The Arena welcomed a diverse audience, which was certainly part of what attracted Eakins to it and inspired him to capture its interior in *Between Rounds*. Despite its recent architectural vintage (1886), the Arena was, in a sense, a relic of the old-style, heterogeneously organized city. Even the type of circus the Arena housed when it was not presenting boxing matches was an old-fashioned, one-ring circus in an era when Barnum-style, three-ring extravaganzas were the norm. This stubborn resistance to modernity was also key to Eakins's fascination with the Arena.

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- 1 See, e.g., Lloyd Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins: His Life and Work* (New York: Whitney Museum, 1933) 103–104, 188–189; Gordon Hendricks, *The Life and Work of Thomas Eakins* (New York: Grossman, 1974) 236–239; Lloyd Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1982) 144–156; and William Innes Homer, *Thomas Eakins: His Life and Art* (New York: Abbeville, 1992) 236–239.
  - 2 See Elizabeth Johns, *Thomas Eakins: The Heroism of Modern Life* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1983), 43, 47, 150; the only one of the three boxing paintings to be illustrated here is *Salutat* (fig. 106).
  - 3 Carl S. Smith, "The Boxing Paintings of Thomas Eakins," *Prospects* 4 (1979): 403–419.
  - 4 Elliott J. Gorn, *The Manly Art: Bare-Knuckle Prize Fighting in America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1986), 197.
  - 5 Gorn, *Manly Art*, 197–198.
  - 6 See Clifford Geertz, "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight," *The Interpretation of Cultures* (HarperCollins, 1973), 412–453.

- 7 In addition to the three major compositions, Eakins produced a number of preparatory oil sketches and related portraits; these will be discussed, as appropriate, in the following sections of this study.
- 8 This transformation has been described in detail by Sam Bass Warner, Jr. in *The Private City: Philadelphia in Three Periods of Its Growth* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania, 1968).
- 9 The only possible exception to this is the 1906 full-length portrait of Monsignor James P. Turner, where the prelate is shown in the Cathedral of Sts. Peter and Paul, located at 18th and Race Streets. Recognizable landscape sites are more common, and include the sections of the Schuylkill River visible in the rowing compositions, as well as the area of Fairmount Park that serves as the setting for *A May Morning in the Park*.
- 10 Eakins may have been working on *Between Rounds* as late as November of 1899, as the painting remained in his studio at that time. See Harrison S. Morris, "To Thomas Eakins," 9 Nov. 1899, *Writing About Eakins: The Manuscripts in Charles Bregler's Thomas Eakins Collection*, Kathleen A. Foster and Cheryl Leibold (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1989), 350 ("P.S. It is the new boxing picture in your studio I especially want").
- 11 See also Susan Danly and Cheryl Leibold, *Eakins and the Photograph: Works by Thomas Eakins and His Circle in the Collection of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press for the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, 1994), cat. no. 399.
- 12 These photographs have been connected to the 1884-1885 painting *The Swimming Hole* (The Fort Worth Art Museum [now The Amon Carter Museum]), as they show some of the same young men who appear in the swimming photographs that clearly are linked with the painting. There are also several dry-plate negatives showing the same students wrestling in the same forest clearing. See Danly and Leibold, *Eakins and the Photograph*, cat. nos. 393-402.
- 13 Ernest Hexamer, *Insurance Maps of the City of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1872, corr. to 1897), sec. 21.
- 14 Joseph Jackson, *Encyclopedia of Philadelphia*, 3 vols. (Harrisburg, PA: National Historical Association, 1931), 535.
- 15 See Jackson, *Encyclopedia*, 500; also *Colosseum Hand Book, Cyclorama of Paris By Night* (Philadelphia: Allen, Lane & Scott's Printing House, 1876), Collection of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA.
- 16 Jackson, *Encyclopedia*, 500. Apparently the Wanamaker family had a propensity for purchasing land on which cyclorama buildings had been erected, as the 1895 Bromley map indicates that the owner of the large lot on the corner of Broad and Cherry Streets was Thomas B. Wanamaker. See George W. and Walter S. Bromley, *Atlas of the City of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: G.W. Bromley and Co., 1895, corr. to 1910), pl. 2.
- 17 The exact chronology of the building's use as a circus is unclear. Several sources (see, e.g., *Inquirer* [Philadelphia], 12 May 1969; *Bulletin* [Philadelphia], 14 Dec. 1956, *Bulletin* [Philadelphia], 31 Jan. 1963; and Jackson, *Encyclopedia*, 536) suggest that the building did not house a circus until 1900, yet a watercolor painting in the collection of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania dated April 1894 shows the building clearly labeled "Winter Circus." Also, an 1897 insurance company map indicates a dual occupancy for the structure, "Winter Circus Co." and "Philadelphia Athletic Club." Hexamer, *Insurance Maps*, sec. 21. Finally, a newspaper account for 1897 suggests that the building was used to house a circus during certain limited time periods, with boxing matches occupying the structure most of the year: "The Arena Athletic Club reopened the Winter Circus last night with one of the best boxing shows that has ever been given in that famous building." *Record* [Philadelphia], 23 Dec. 1897, 11. For such a "famous" building, I have found a frustrating lack of extant material on it.

- 18 See Hexamer, *Insurance Maps*, sec. 21. Most jurisdictions for which I have been able to track the legal status of prize fighting required that fights be arranged by an established private athletic club. These clubs were often set up solely for the purpose of promoting fights and offered none of the facilities found in traditional athletic clubs. Such a club's ability to hold prize fights was specified in its charter, usually under euphemistic terms, like "scientific glove contests" or "sparring exhibitions." These vague terms invited litigation, as occurred in New Orleans in 1893 and, though not in the context of a club's charter, in Mississippi three years earlier. *State v. Olympic Club*, 15 So. 190 (La. 1894); *Sullivan v. State*, 7 So. 275 (Miss. 1890). Still, the charter provided a certain degree of protection from legal interference. The "Philadelphia Athletic Club" may well have been this type of organization, as I have found no evidence that the Arena was used as anything other than a performance space. It was not until 1923 that public boxing was formally legalized and regulated in Pennsylvania. 1923 June 14, P.L. 710.
- 19 J. B. McCormick, "Macon's Gossip," *Weekly Item* (Philadelphia), 12 June 1897, 2. The thick padding would have been helpful in preventing the kind of impact acceleration brain injuries described in Part One.
- 20 *Bulletin* [Philadelphia], 31 Jan. 1963. The conversion of the Arena back to its original use was accomplished in just two weeks, and the painting was finished in five weeks by Salvatore Mege, who had worked on the two earlier panoramas displayed here, and a "corps" of artists. Jackson, *Encyclopedia* 536.
- 21 *Inquirer* [Philadelphia], 12 May 1969.
- 22 *Record* [Philadelphia], 6 Jan. 1898, 11. The 1923 Pennsylvania law that formally allowed and regulated boxing explicitly forbade children (or youths under the age of eighteen) from participating in any form of boxing, including exhibitions. 1923 June 14, P.L. 710, §12. Today, no one under the age of sixteen may even attend a boxing match unless he or she is accompanied by an adult. 5 Pa. C. S. S 1122 (1995).
- 23 *Evening Bulletin* [Philadelphia], 23 Apr. 1898, 6.
- 24 Both Walcott and West had national reputations; Peter Maher, Kid McCoy, Kid Lavigne and Owen Ziegler all fought in the Arena ring. There were exceptions to the rule that the wind-up matched heavier men: on Saturday, January 8, 1898, bantamweights Frank Fisher and Steve Flanagan met in the wind-up. *Record* [Philadelphia], 6 Jan. 1898, 11.
- 25 Goodrich (1982) II: 149. These identifications were provided to Goodrich by Clarence Cranmer many years after the fact (in 1930) and may not be entirely reliable, as is clear from Goodrich's misidentification of the fallen fighter in *Taking the Count*. However, we know Ellwood McCloskey was in the Arena that night, as he fought in one of the evening's earlier bouts. *Inquirer* [Philadelphia], 23 Apr. 1898, 4. There is no listing for a "Billy McCarney" in the 1898 or 1899 Philadelphia city directories, but one Billy McLean was a local boxing instructor who ran a school at 1319 Arch Street, less than two blocks from the Arena. McLean may well have been at the fights that night, as one of his known pupils, Harry Berger, was on the evening's program. *Press* [Philadelphia], 23 Apr. 1898, 12. Whether Billy Smith was also one of McLean's students is not known.
- 26 *Press* [Philadelphia], 23 Apr. 1898, 12.
- 27 *Press* [Philadelphia], 23 Apr. 1898, 12; see also *Inquirer* [Philadelphia], 21 Apr. 1898, 4. The *Inquirer* agreed with the *Press* reporter's assessment of the result of the match at the time, yet just two weeks later it confused the issue in an article on an upcoming match: "In the preliminaries, Billy Smith, who so cleverly bested Tim Callahan a few weeks ago, will meet John Montroy." See *Inquirer* [Philadelphia], 23 Apr. 1898, 4; *Inquirer* [Philadelphia], 6 May 1898, 4.

- 28 See Barbara Rubin, "Aesthetic Ideology and Urban Design," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 69 (1979): 346-347. Rubin quotes from a contemporary description of the site: John DeWitt Warner, "Advertising Run Mad," *Municipal Affairs*, June 1900: 275-276.
- 29 Leland M. Roth, *A Concise History of American Architecture* (New York: Harper & Row, 1980), 131-132, 135.
- 30 Eakins was asked specifically for advice on lighting for the largest life-class studio. See Goodrich (1982) I: 169, citing *The Nation*, 4 May 1876: 297.
- 31 William C. Brownell, "The Art Schools of Philadelphia," *Scribner's Monthly Illustrated Magazine* 20 (1880): 1-15; Fairman Rogers, "The Schools of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts," *The Penn Monthly* 12 (1881): 453-462.
- 32 Dorothy Gondos Beers, "The Centennial City," in *Philadelphia: A 300-Year History*, ed. Russell F. Wiegley (New York: W.W. Norton, 1982), 449, quoting the *Evening Telegraph* [Philadelphia], 23 Mar. 1876.
- 33 Goodrich (1982) II: 292.
- 34 Goodrich (1982) II:293; Charles R. Deacon, "Clubs in Philadelphia," *The City of Philadelphia as it Appears in the Year 1893* (Philadelphia: Geo. S. Harris & Sons, 1893), 120.
- 35 Daniel Nelson, *Managers and Workers: Origins of the New Factory System in the United States 1880-1920* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin, 1975), 7.
- 36 *History of the Baldwin Locomotive Works: 1831-1923* (Philadelphia, 1923?), 71-71, 93; see also *History of the Baldwin Locomotive Works: 1831-1907* (Philadelphia: Edgell Co., 1907).
- 37 See, e.g., *Illustrated Catalog of Locomotives* (Philadelphia: Press of J. B. Lippincott, 1871?); *Illustrated Catalog of Narrow-Gauge Locomotives* ([Philadelphia]: G. H. Buchanan, 1900); *Baldwin Locomotive Works: Record of Recent Construction, Nos. 11-20, Inclusive* (Philadelphia, 1900?).
- 38 Bromley, *Atlas*, pl. 8.
- 39 See also Hexamer, *Insurance Maps*, sec. 21.
- 40 The information on the demolition of the Westchester Hotel and railroad office is from the inscription on the watercolor painting.
- 41 The source for the information on the blocks surrounding the Pennsylvania Academy and the Arena is Hexamer, *Insurance Maps* sec. 21.
- 42 The exact nature of the "trimmings" produced in this factory is not specified on the Hexamer map.
- 43 A similar situation existed for the residents of the tiny dwellings and patrons of the saloon wedged in between a stable and the city's fire department supply house (which included a blacksmith's shop, engine room and repair shop) in the area east of Goodwill Court. Also sharing this cramped area were a wagon shed, gas meter works, and a sign painting business.
- 44 See Richard Saul Wurman and John Andrew Gallery, *Man-Made Philadelphia: A Guide to Its Physical and Cultural Environment* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1972), 38, 98, 100; Glazer, *Theatres*, 160.
- 45 See Beers, "Centennial City," 426.

# Men Bathing, 1883: Eakins and Seurat Both Subverted What They Believed Was the Task of Art

ARTHUR C. DANTO, 1995

In 1883 the artists Thomas Eakins and Georges Seurat, neither one part of the other's world, each executed a major painting that showed a group of men at a bathing place—a swimming [*sic*] hole, in the case of Eakins (in the Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth), and a *baignade* (a site where horses were washed down on the bank of a river), to use the word Seurat took as his title (in the National Gallery, London). Despite the word's rural overtones, Seurat's scene in Asnières is an industrial settlement, with factories in the distance, and the sunbathing men belong to the working classes. They are lounging on the riverbanks, though it is, we may infer, a working day, for there is smoke coming from the factory chimneys. Given the length of the workday in France, from dark to dark, we cannot assume that the men are taking a moment's relaxation in the late afternoon before returning home. They are, we must conclude, out of work, which explains why there are no women among them: this is not a Sunday at the Grande Jatte. The year 1883 fell in the middle of a prolonged depression in France, and the men have time on their hands. They are staring blankly off into the distance, having nothing better to do. Their condition is that of not working rather than of being at leisure in any positive way. Their clothes are only half off, or half on, an indication of their unsettled situation.

The nakedness of Eakins's sporting men, on the other hand, is the mark of their being at play and away from work. Here there are no class distinctions. Indeed, one feels, the absence of clothing is a metaphor for the proposition that all men are created equal, inequality being something we put on and take off with our garments. Moreover, the men have left responsibility behind—as personified by the absent women—and their nakedness, unacceptable in female company, is a mark of being men together. They are naked in the great outdoors, having a good time.

The contrast between the classless men in Eakins's world and the class-ridden ones in Seurat's, between innocent outdoor pleasure in a kind of natural paradise and the aching dullness of empty time, between taking a

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Arthur C. Danto, "Men Bathing, 1883: Eakins and Seurat Both Subverted What They Believed Was the Task of Art," *ARTnews* 94 (March 1995): 95–96. © 1995 by Arthur C. Danto. Reprinted by permission of Georges Borchardt, Inc., for the author.



holiday from the company of women and being deprived of female companionship—and between the two bodies of water, one untouched by industry and the other clouded by factory buildings—amounts to two counterposed moral realities, two forms of life, two ways of being. Even the dogs in the two paintings seem to represent the difference between the tired pessimism projected by the one painting and the robust affirmativeness expressed by the other.

It is always interesting to inquire of a painting whether it actually belongs to the reality it projects—whether, for example, Eakins's painting is part of the world implied by *The Swimming Hole* [*Swimming*]. Eakins was an outdoorsman, happier, it is said, in the company of men than women, and he subscribed to the philosophical views of Walt Whitman regarding democracy, freedom, and the goodness of the naked human body. His painting shows a Whitmanesque world in which he himself, and his frequently painted dog, Rusty, are immersed—but it is hard to see the painting as a Whitmanesque object. It belongs in a parlor, in a gilded frame, and it suggests the life from which the bathers are truant. One is certain that it was executed indoors, in the studio, by a master of naturalistic representation: whatever it depicts, it breathes the values of the academy.

Seurat's canvas, on the other hand, depicts a world in transition. But it embodies a set of changes as well: it has begun to break free of the mode of picture making with which Eakins was altogether comfortable. Seurat's contemporaries did not know what to make of it, or him. Someone astutely compared it to a Renaissance fresco, and indeed there is what art historians would call an "affinity" between *Une Baignade, Asnières* and works by Piero della Francesca. Perhaps it has to do with the surface, or the application of modern color theory (in Seurat's case), or the stolid geometry of the inert figures. Whatever the case, the painting belongs to a new pulse of history. It is, already in 1883, a modern work. Like industrialization, modernism in art did not come without certain human costs.

It is difficult to believe that the two paintings are contemporary. And yet there is an almost fateful kind of modernism in Eakins's work as well, though its implications would hardly have been visible in 1883. The deployment of the figures in a triangular composition is altogether classical. The reclining figure—his knee occluding the sight of his genitals (which is hardly in the Whitmanesque spirit)—is in the pose of a river god. But we can't help feeling that the group has the appearance of a single individual gradually rising and then diving into the water: it looks like a sequence of photographic images of a person in motion by Eadweard Muybridge or Etienne-Jules Marey.

Muybridge's images of moving horses, meant to settle once and for all the question of whether a trotting horse at any point has all four feet off the ground, were published in 1878 and were avidly studied by artists, Eakins included. Indeed, Eakins was obsessed with photography and invented what is in effect an early version of a moving-picture camera. Muybridge, it is well known, used a bank of cameras, whose shutters were triggered sequentially by the passing horse. This meant that each image came from a different point of origin, which Eakins objected to as *scientifically* inaccurate for observational purposes. His own invention, appropriating an idea of Marey's, uses a single camera with two rotating disks. Eakins was instrumental in securing an appointment for Muybridge at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts [sic: University of Pennsylvania]. And he produced in his own right some extremely handsome multiple-exposure photographs of moving figures.

Eakins's interest in the photography of motion was very like Seurat's interest in the color theories of Ogden Rood. Both painters were concerned with capturing the way the world appeared to the eyes, and in that sense both were very much in the great tradition of pictorial verisimilitude. Science was a means to artistic fidelity. Still, in Eakins's case, he could at best show the way figures look when they are in motion—he couldn't show them moving. He didn't anticipate the technology that would be able to show things moving—cinematography—which was developed in the next decade by the Lumière brothers in France and by Edison in the United States.

What is especially haunting in *The Swimming Hole* is the way it uses ideas that gave rise to a technique of representation capable of showing directly something painting could only imply. Eakins's use of techniques influenced by photography as a means to further artistic fidelity ironically contributed to the progress of a technology that would undermine the idea of verisimilitude in painting. Like Seurat, in the end, he was subverting what he believed was the task of art, making way for a kind of painting neither could have imagined, and necessitating a philosophy of art to replace the one each lived by. The future cast its shadow over these two great paintings of 1883, but no one was able to see it.

# Thomas Eakins Under the Microscope: A Technical Study of the Rowing Paintings

CHRISTINA CURRIE, 1996

The gathering together of all of the rowing paintings, related drawings, watercolors, and oil studies gives us a unique opportunity for an in-depth comparative study of Eakins's oil paintings and invites inquiry into the processes he used to create them. *The Biglin Brothers Turning the Stake*, the largest and most ambitious painting in the series, served as the starting point for this study. Through analysis by microscope and x-radiography, we are now able to identify many of the individual steps, not always visible to the naked eye, that Eakins employed to convey a powerful sense of observed reality. What these steps reveal is an artist preoccupied with perspective and measurement.

Eakins absorbed the idea of extensive preparation from his teacher Jean-Léon Gérôme, with whom he studied in Paris from 1866 to 1869.<sup>1</sup> Gérôme used drawings, oil studies, and photography to gather information for his compositions, sometimes employing draftsmen for perspective and architectural details. His influence can be seen in Eakins's analytical approach to the rowing paintings.

Although no complete sequence of preparatory work for any single rowing painting survives, from the considerable extant material we can reasonably speculate on the procedures Eakins followed.<sup>2</sup> He began with rough on-the-spot pencil drawings, such as the small architectural sketch of the Girard Avenue Bridge for *The Champion Single Sculls*. At the same time, he made oil sketches, establishing composition and color relationships, such as *Sketch of Max Schmitt in a Single Scull* and *The Oarsmen*. The former is not a study for *The Champion Single Sculls*, but may relate to the second figure, position of the boat, and background for *Oarsmen on the Schuylkill*. *The Oarsmen* can be related in its figural composition to *The Biglin Brothers Turning the Stake* and *The Biglin Brothers Racing*.

Next, Eakins most likely created mechanical drawings of the central elements of the composition, in particular the scull, based on measurements of the actual boat.<sup>3</sup> For example, *Perspective Drawings for The Biglin Brothers Racing* shows a perspective rendering of the scull, a side view, the scull's position in the water, and written notations throughout the sheet concerning

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Christina Currie, "Thomas Eakins Under the Microscope: A Technical Study of the Rowing Paintings," in Helen Cooper et al., *Thomas Eakins, The Rowing Pictures* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Art Gallery; Yale University Press, 1996), 90-101ff. Reprinted by permission of Yale University Press and the author.

measurements and shadows. In other sheets drawn to the scale of the paintings, such as the *Perspective Drawing for The Biglin Brothers Turning the Stake*, Eakins focused only on the scull, establishing its placement and rendering precise details of its construction. In other perspective drawings, he brought together rowers and boat.<sup>4</sup>

In a lecture on vanishing points, Eakins explained that using colored inks was the least complicated way to approach complex drawings.<sup>5</sup> In the rowing drawings, he employed blue ink for lines purely concerned with perspective, such as the marks for square footage in the ground and for the horizon line and central vertical line, and red ink to enclose complicated projections such as the end of an oar. Finally, he outlined the main forms in pencil, later strengthening them with black ink.

Eakins then transferred his carefully worked out drawings to canvas, an exercise in precision and planning. The canvases he used were finely textured, plainly woven, and commercially primed with a white ground layer.<sup>6</sup> All the rowing paintings examined reveal that Eakins made a series of unusually exact markings either on or scratched into this ground layer. These markings served as guidelines for the positions and contours of boats, oars, waves, and principal figures. Through examination by microscope, x-radiography, and infrared reflectography, we can detect three distinct types of markings: incised lines, prick marks, and drawing lines. Many lines are partially filled with the subsequent paint, which proves that Eakins cut into the dry ground layer before beginning to paint; more markings probably remain hidden beneath thicker paint. Most of the incised lines appear to have been ruled with a sharp metal stylus, possibly, through a sheet of transfer paper.<sup>7</sup> They function as horizontal and diagonal grids for important elements in the design as well as for contours and outlines. Eakins also incised short arcs, probably with a compass, to mark off important points.

*The Biglin Brothers Turning the Stake* contains the greatest number of preliminary markings, in the form of lines incised into the ground layer prior to painting. The locations of these lines were observed with a microscope and x-radiographs and then plotted on a full-scale tracing of the painting. Eakins's incised lines and compass arcs precisely position all four boats; waves, splashes, and reflections are given similar treatment. A set of lines locates the oar as it hits the water in the lower right corner, and closely grouped, curved vertical lines indicate the reflection of the red-flagged stake at the far left. . . .

Visible only under the microscope or in a magnified x-radiograph are tiny prick marks which follow the outlines and contours of the heads, torsos,

and clothing of the oarsmen in at least three rowing paintings: *The Biglin Brothers Turning the Stake*, *The Pair-Oared Shell*, and *The Biglin Brothers Racing*.<sup>8</sup> Eakins also used prick marks to delineate the rounded elements of the bridges in *The Champion Single Sculls*.<sup>9</sup> He probably pricked through a preliminary drawing or intermediary tracing onto the canvas, joined these marks in pencil, and reinforced the outlines with a drafting pen or fine brush. The prick marks in *The Biglin Brothers Turning the Stake* reveal Eakins's decision to change the composition: approximately 1/2 inch above John Biglin's left arm lies a second line of prick marks, indicating an earlier placement of the arm.<sup>10</sup>

Along with the incised lines and prick marks, Eakins used drawing, probably in graphite, to mark boats, architectural features, and dominant reflections, as well as to provide general compositional guidelines. Partially visible through thin or light paint under the microscope, these markings are based on the perspective drawings. For example, in *The Biglin Brothers Turning the Stake*, there is a vertical line from the fingers of Barney Biglin's right arm to the bottom edge of the canvas, providing the central axis for the arrangement of waves in perspective,<sup>11</sup> and a ruled diagonal line from the right edge to approximately the center of the right side of the boat, which locates the uppermost tip of the scull. These precise notations appear in Eakins's perspective study of the subject.

One additional type of marking has been identified: large, conical pinpricks made at approximately 1-inch intervals along all four edges of *The Biglin Brothers Turning the Stake*. Easily discernable without magnification, these markings do not appear on any of the other rowing paintings and seem unrelated to the preparatory drawings. Most likely, they were caused by the adherence of transfer paper when Eakins created a now lost, full-scale watercolor of the painting or when his pupil Alice Barber made an engraving of it for *Scribner's Monthly* in June 1880. Thus these pinholes record a later process, unrelated to Eakins's preparatory stage.

When the transfer of his preparatory drawings to canvas was complete, Eakins began the painting process. In *The Champion Single Sculls* and *The Biglin Brothers Turning the Stake*, he first subtly modified the white ground color with a translucent toning layer, brown black in the latter and pale blue in the former painting.<sup>12</sup> At a microscopic level, the commercially primed ground layers on both these paintings are pitted with tiny rounded craters that are probably burst air bubbles. They impart a slightly textured surface or "tooth" not visible when examining Eakins's other rowing canvases or paintings from the early 1870s.<sup>13</sup> When *Turning the Stake* is examined

closely, the brown-black modifying layer can be seen on the unpainted edges, wherever the paint is thin and, under magnification, in the tiny burst air bubbles of the ground surface. In paint cross-sections of the sky, the toning appears as a thin, dark, transparent, particle-free layer. Probably with the aid of a template,<sup>14</sup> Eakins avoided brushing dark toning on the area reserved for the boat, giving it a luminous quality in comparison to its surroundings.

The boats and oarsmen in the rowing scenes are thinly painted, with the paint layers following the incised lines exactly, imparting a sense of precision and conviction. But Eakins set these sculls and figures against painterly and less controlled areas, employing techniques ranging from the vigorous use of the palette knife for skies to the delicate application of opaque paint and glazes for the sculls. For example, he achieves an intense, jewel like effect in *The Schreiber Brothers*: a bright red glaze and pink opaque paint on the oarsmen's caps and a deep red glaze on the shadowed sides of the orange struts are optimized by the cool, dark tones of the pier behind. Of all the rowing paintings, *The Biglin Brothers Turning the Stake* displays the most varied combination of techniques, with x-radiographs revealing Eakins's variations in paint thickness and approach. The thick, flat opaque landscape and spontaneous, multilayered sky contrasts dramatically with the thin water zone containing carefully executed boats and figures.

Eakins conveyed the liquid quality and reflective properties of water by using techniques borrowed from both traditional oil painting and watercolor. In *The Pair-Oared Shell*, he created highlights in the upper central water area by scratching through dry, gray paint with a sharp instrument to expose a white underlayer. Conversely, in *The Champion Single Sculls* and *The Biglin Brothers Turning the Stake*, Eakins employed the watercolor device of reserving portions of the light ground to serve as highlights in the foreground waves.<sup>15</sup> In the upper left and right of the latter painting, he thinned the paint while it was still wet, most likely through rubbing the surface with a turpentine-soaked cloth or brush, achieving a washlike paint layer appropriate for depicting water. He executed the bright reflective surface of the water near the river bank with thin, fluid, vertical brushstrokes, while the lower half of the river is created with thicker, horizontal strokes to suggest movement and surface ripples. To break up the brown reflection of the red-capped rower, he applied a blunt point, probably the end of a brush, to lift strokes of wet paint from the surface of the canvas. He also glazed much of the upper water with a subtle, greenish-yellow color. Muddy, opaque brushstrokes tone down some of the brighter blues in the water, mirroring a similar dulling down of the bright blue paint in the sky.

In contrast to the masterly effects Eakins achieved in the water areas and skies, the river bank in this painting appears dense and lacks luminosity. Indeed, he admitted to Gérôme in 1874 that he was experiencing problems keeping his tones from sliding together into muddiness at the dark end of the value scale or into weakness around the lights.<sup>16</sup> A cross-section taken from the central area of greenish vegetation in *The Biglin Brothers Turning the Stake* reveals no less than three revisions, a record of Eakins's admitted struggle with tonality and color.

Skies in the rowing paintings are often agitated and thickly painted, providing passages of movement that complement the relative calm of the river. Eakins frequently softened the horizon line between trees and sky with a few wet-in-wet strokes, as in *The Pair-Oared Shell*. He used a palette knife for the upper layers of sky in *The Biglin Brothers Turning the Stake*, *The Schreiber Brothers*, and the oil study for *John Biglin in a Single Scull*. This technique probably derives from his brief period of study with the French painter Léon Bonnat, whose bold paint application provided an alternative to Gérôme's subordination of surface texture. Eakins also was impressed by Velázquez's expressive approach, for he recorded in his "Spanish notebook" that, like the seventeenth-century master, he found it best to use a palette knife when drawing with color.<sup>17</sup>

Although some of the most exciting brushwork appears in the skies of the rowing paintings, Eakins maintained the focal point of the composition on the subject. He may even have regarded a bright blue sky as a distraction, for most of the rowing paintings have reworked and toned-down skies.<sup>18</sup> A cross-section taken from the sky in *The Biglin Brothers Turning the Stake* reveals a layered structure: first Eakins painted the sky light blue, then he toned it down with a creamy ocher applied thickly with a palette knife. Similarly, in the oil study for *John Biglin in a Single Scull*, the sky is composed of three distinct layers of blue paint from bottom to top: an intense medium blue, a light blue, and a muddy color applied with a palette knife. In the skies depicted in four paintings, *The Biglin Brothers Turning the Stake*, *The Pair-Oared Shell*, *The Schreiber Brothers*, and *The Biglin Brothers Racing*, Eakins smeared a thin, abraded, granular, ocher-colored layer unevenly over much of the paint surface to reduce the brightness and warm the tonality.<sup>19</sup>

We can gain insight into Eakins's choice of painting materials through pigment and medium analyses. *The Biglin Brothers Turning the Stake* was chosen as a representative rowing painting for limited sampling and non-destructive analysis. The commercially applied white ground layer consists of mostly lead white, with small proportions of iron in the upper

regions.<sup>20</sup> Bone black provides the basic component of the brown toning layer.<sup>21</sup> In the body of the painting, cobalt blue was found in the Biglins' head covers and in the blue flag;<sup>22</sup> the pigment vermilion, in the opposing team's head covers and flag.<sup>23</sup> In various parts of the river bank, viridian, an intense transparent green, and cadmium yellow were found.<sup>24</sup> Lead white and zinc white dominate in the sky, with lead-rich layers alternating between zinc/lead rich bands.<sup>25</sup> Eakins may have purchased a mixture of lead and zinc white, a mixture available on the market in a single paint.<sup>26</sup> Alternatively, he may have carefully layered the two whites in deference to their distinct advantages and disadvantages: zinc white possesses high opacity but becomes brittle on drying; lead white has advantageous drying properties but low tinting strength. Eakins also may have shared the fear, expressed by late nineteenth-century writers on art, of the possible chemical changes caused by hydrogen sulfide on lead white. Various solutions were proposed, and he may have acted on one that advised artists either to mix or layer lead white with zinc white.<sup>27</sup> Medium analysis was conducted on two minute samples of the sky from *Turning the Stake*. In the upper, creamy ocher layer, the presence of an aged oil, possibly linseed, is suggested, which would be normal for the period. Somewhat more unusual, a natural resin was detected in the lower light blue layer.<sup>28</sup>

The evidence presented here reveals that Eakins, at the beginning of his development as a painter, was already a superb draftsman and master of technical problems. One of the most striking aspects of his process is the novel method of transferring a design from a drawing to the canvas using a combination of incised lines, pinpricks, and drawing lines. Equally noteworthy is his continual search for a balance of tone, color, and texture. Although reworking in the landscapes and skies betrays Eakins's relative inexperience as a painter, he found remarkably innovative solutions for the depiction of water. And he delicately layered paint for the skulls and their crews, enhancing the exquisite detail of his compositions. He relished the technical challenges involved in portraying objects as intricately constructed and finely proportioned as rowing boats. Through his detailed perspective drawings, drawn to the scale of the finished paintings, through compositional studies, watercolors, and oils, Eakins endeavored to create a series of rowing paintings equal in craftsmanship and technical achievement to the boats and the sport he loved.



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- 1 Perspective lines and detailed underdrawings for forms have been detected in Gérôme's work: an underdrawn perspective framework visible with the naked eye in *The Tulip Watch*, 1882 (Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore); infrared reflectography revealed detailed underdrawing in *Lion on the Watch*, c. 1885 (The Cleveland Museum of Art).
  - 2 Charles Bregler, "Thomas Eakins as a Teacher," *Arts* 17 (March 1931): 384.
  - 3 A surviving box of drafting tools originally belonging to Eakins and probably dating back to his school days contains instruments necessary for these types of drawings: dividers, compasses, ruling pens, and a lettering pen; see Phyllis D. Rosenzweig, *The Thomas Eakins Collection of the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1977), 223.
  - 4 For a full discussion of the perspective drawings, see Amy Werbel's essay ("Perspective in Thomas Eakins' Rowing Pictures"). The only two extant drawings for *The Biglin Brothers Turning the Stake* were owned by Charles Bregler. His correspondence with Henry Sayles Francis, formerly curator of paintings at The Cleveland Museum of Art, offers tantalizing clues regarding other drawings, now lost, for the painting. In a letter dated March 22, 1942, Bregler wrote: "Eakins made accurate drawings of the ground plan of the boat, etc. But it was impossible to save them, the paper being in a state of decay. These are the only two drawings that remain that he made for this painting." In a letter to Francis dated March 30, 1943, Bregler described the boat drawings on drafting paper he had discovered twenty-five years earlier, including the large perspective drawing for this painting: "They were rolled up and were in an old trunk. When I tried to unroll them, they crumbled to pieces—and I was only successful in saving a few. To me they are rare documents as they so fully give a very graphic picture of Eakins' methods, and the minute study of every detail—made from measurements of the boat." Both letters are in The Cleveland Museum of Art, Registrar files.
  - 5 "[T]o avoid complications, it is as well in all extended drawings to use three different inks, a blue ink for instance for the square feet marks in the ground plan and from the picture of these square feet in the perspective plan, for the horizon, and middle one; in short for all the purely perspective scale parts. Secondly a red ink for axes of construction, or simpler figures enclosing the complex ones not sought directly; and finally black ink for the finished outlines." Thomas Eakins, "Vanishing Points," unpublished lecture, c. 1884, PMA.
  - 6 Many of his canvases came from Janetzky and Company, one of the best art materials suppliers in Philadelphia. The company's label appears on the backs of *Oarsmen on the Schuylkill*, *The Biglin Brothers Turning the Stake*, and *The Champion Single Sculls*.
  - 7 Lloyd Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins: His Life and Work* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1933), 42, relates that a detailed perspective drawing would be drawn to the same scale as the canvas and transferred to canvas with transfer paper. Incised markings can also be seen in *Sailboats Racing*, 1874 (Philadelphia Museum of Art) and *Starting Out After Rail*, 1874 (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston).
  - 8 The dark brown "toning" layer accumulated layers of dirt and varnish probably account for the dark appearance of the prick marks through the microscope.
  - 9 The tiny dots around the bridges appeared black when observed under the microscope. It is assumed that they are prick marks, as in *The Biglin Brothers Turning the Stake*, but no complete x-radiograph exists for verification.

- 10 Alternatively, this line of prick marks may indicate an error made during Eakins' transfer process.
- 11 A vertical center line is frequently observed in Eakins' work, not only in oil paintings, but also in drawings and watercolors. It can be seen with the naked eye in *The Meadows, Gloucester*, c. 1882 (Philadelphia Museum of Art) in the green area of the foreground, and in *Sailing*, c. 1875 (Philadelphia Museum of Art) in the foreground, middle ground, and just above the horizon for approximately one inch.
- 12 It was not determined if Eakins used a toning layer on the grounds of the other rowing paintings; however, colored toning layers are common in his work. They have been detected on many of his paintings at the Philadelphia Museum of Art; Theodor Siegl, various drafts of his 1978 catalogue, kindly lent by Evan Turner, former director, The Cleveland Museum of Art. Many oil sketches on canvas and primed paper from the Bregler Collection at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts also have brown tinting layers; see Mark F. Bockrath, Virginia N. Naude, and Debbie Hess Norris, "Thomas Eakins, Painter, Sculptor, Photographer," *Journal of the American Institute for Conservation* 31 (1992), 51-64.
- 13 This "tooth" was not visible on Eakins' other sculling canvases or on other paintings from the early 1870s examined with the microscope: *The Pair-Oared Shell*, *The Biglin Brothers Racing*, *The Schreiber Brothers*, *Starting Out After Rail*, and *Sailboats Racing*. *Oarsmen on the Schuylkill* was not examined by the author.
- 14 I am grateful to Bruce Robertson for suggesting this possibility.
- 15 I noted Eakins's technique of reserving prearranged spaces for separate parts of the design when examining his watercolor *John Biglin in a Single Scull*.
- 16 Kathleen A. Foster and Cheryl Leibold, *Writing About Eakins: The Manuscripts in Charles Bregler's Thomas Eakins Collection* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press for The Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, 1989), 62.
- 17 William Innes Homer, *Thomas Eakins: His Life and Art* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1992), 48-49.
- 18 For other examples in Eakins' painting of reworking a blue sky with a palette knife to tone it down, see Theodor Siegl, *The Thomas Eakins Collection* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1978), 89-90, 93.
- 19 Whether this represents Eakins' uppermost layer or the remains of early restoration remains an unresolved question.
- 20 Sky cross-section analyzed by x-ray dot mapping and EDX analysis. Analysis carried out by James Smith at NASA Lewis Research Center. Analysis performed on a JEOL 840-A electron microscope. The experimental conditions were presented in a paper by Christina Currie and James Smith, "The Biglin Brothers Turning a Stake-Boat by Thomas Eakins: A Technical Study Reveals Surprising Techniques," at the 1994 meeting of the American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works, Nashville.

- 21** Calcium, phosphorus, and oxygen found by x-ray dot mapping and EDX analysis suggests the presence of bone black.
- 22** Cobalt detected by x-ray fluorescence spectrometer conducted by Bruce Christmas, Head of Conservation at The Cleveland Museum of Art. A Kevex 0975 A Energy Dispersive X-Ray Fluorescence Spectrometer was used. Most analyses were conducted using 50 KV, 3.3 Ma Excitation conditions with a mixed barium carbonate and strontium carbonate secondary target. Occasionally a single target of either barium or strontium carbonate was used. In most cases an approximately 4 mm area of the painting was examined using a 6 mm collimator on the x-ray tube and a 2 mm collimator on the detector.
- 23** Mercury, characteristic of vermilion, was detected by x-ray fluorescence spectroscopy.
- 24** Chromium detected by x-ray fluorescence spectroscopy, presence of viridian confirmed by polarizing microscopy. Cadmium detected by x-ray fluorescence spectroscopy.
- 25** X-ray dot mapping and EDX analysis were used.
- 26** For example, Windsor and Newton's "New White," which was listed in the company's catalogue. I am grateful to Leslie Carlyle for sending me this information from her unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, "A Critical Analysis of Artists' Handbooks, Manuals and Treatises on Oil Painting Published in Britain Between 1800-1900: With Reference to Selected Eighteenth Century Sources" (London: Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London, 1991).
- 27** Ibid.
- 28** The presence of a natural resin is further suggested by examination of the sky cross-section under ultraviolet excitation: transparent areas of medium within the light blue layer fluoresce white, a known characteristic of natural resins. This discovery confirms the experience of conservators cleaning Eakins' work, who have observed that his paint can be highly sensitive to their usual solvents for removing discolored varnish and have blamed the problem on his "resinous" paint mixtures. Hilaire Hiler, *Notes on the Technique of Painting* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954), 166, notes, "Girardot said that this medium gave paintings 'the solidity of flint.' The Duroziez oil is prepared by the firm of Duroziez of Paris, and is now known by the trade name of Oliesse." It is possible that Eakins was attempting to reconstitute an oil resin similar to that used by Gérôme, whose painting medium is said to have been composed of four parts oil copal varnish mixed with Duroziez oil and three parts rectified oil of spike or turpentine.

# Perspective in Eakins' Rowing Pictures

AMY B. WERBEL, 1996

The ten perspective drawings Thomas Eakins made for his rowing paintings rank among the most remarkable works of his career. These drawings record the dimensions and positions of boats, rowers, and landscape elements with such precision that we can determine the time of day and orientation represented in each scene and fix Eakins's position as viewer.<sup>1</sup> This level of accuracy and detail is unmatched among nineteenth-century American painters and reflects Eakins's many years of specialized training in mathematics, linear perspective, and mechanical drawing.

## Training in Linear Perspective and Mechanical Drawing

Eakins began his formal study of mathematics and drawing in 1857, at the time he entered Central High School in Philadelphia. Central's selective and rigorous program offered a curriculum heavily weighted in favor of sciences; nearly one third of Eakins's courses were in mathematics alone, including algebra, trigonometry, geometry, and differential and integral calculus.<sup>2</sup> The drawing program at Central, which served as Eakins's introduction to art, was greatly influenced by the school's scientific orientation. Although Rembrandt Peale's general tome, *Graphics*, served as the introductory text for the drawing curriculum, the program soon moved on to drawing systems that combined advanced mathematics and art. Eakins's junior and senior years included rigorous study of the related sciences of perspective and mechanical drawing.<sup>3</sup>

*Mechanical Drawing: Three Spirals* exemplifies the training Eakins received during these years. This study depicts three types of common screwthreads, each meticulously drawn in plan and elevation following an illustration in the class textbook, A. Cornu's *Course of Linear Drawing Applied to the Drawing of Machinery*.<sup>4</sup> This exercise served as a model of the type of work expected of mechanical draftsmen: both plan and elevation provide measured, accurate information that would assist in the manufacture of real objects. Eakins succinctly noted the advantages of this discipline in a treatise he wrote in 1882:

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Amy B. Werbel, "Perspective in Eakins' Rowing Pictures," in Helen Cooper et al., **Thomas Eakins: The Rowing Pictures** (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Art Gallery; Yale University Press, 1996), 79–89. Reprinted by permission of Yale University Press and the author.

A perspective drawing of a thing gives a workman the best notion of the looks of the thing, but he could not measure from a perspective as from a mechanical drawing.<sup>5</sup>

Providing measurable information visually required facility not only in drawing but also in descriptive geometry, a system of orthographic projection invented by Gaspard Monge in the late eighteenth century. Monge's new system of representation implied an infinitely extended viewpoint, which permitted "the measured dimensions of the forms to remain constant in one, two or three planes, since perspectival diminution [was] eliminated in whole or in part."<sup>6</sup> Previous vanishing point systems had distorted dimensions and relationships in the course of foreshortening the scene. As Eakins remarked, traditional linear perspective gave a good idea of how things looked, but little assistance in actually building them.

Eakins's *Three Spirals* presents a simple example of mechanical drawing based on the principles of descriptive geometry. The ground plans at the bottom provide the measurements necessary for raising the elevations above. The inclusion of both these views is a hallmark of drawings using this system.

Monge's descriptive geometry was not only important for the engineers for whom it was originally intended. Monge himself adapted the system for Neoclassical artists, including Jacques-Louis David. Later, the first decades of the nineteenth century saw a proliferation of textbooks utilizing perspective systems requiring ground plans and elevations.<sup>7</sup> Eakins's training in Paris between 1866 and 1870 increased his familiarity with this most rigorous of perspective modes.<sup>8</sup> Although there is little evidence that Eakins specifically studied perspective in Paris, his professor, Jean-Léon Gérôme, seems to have utilized a method based on descriptive geometry in his own work, perhaps even receiving the assistance of professional draftsmen to complete his complex designs.<sup>9</sup>

Gérôme's *Hail Caesar! We Who Are About to Die Salute You* is a perfect example of the type of subject made possible by systems based on descriptive geometry. Here the long, curving lines of the amphitheater sweep from the far distance nearly into our space in a continuous arc. At upper left, a mesh canopy inclines over the heads of the athletes, lifting upward as it nears the edge of the canvas. Curved subjects and inclined planes were traditionally among the most vexing perspective problems. Descriptive geometry offered artists a way to plot any point in space with equal ease, regardless of its relationship to the picture plane. As Eakins's instructor and role model, Gérôme provided an influential example in such disciplined use of perspective.

### Perspective Process in the Rowing Pictures

Shortly after Eakins's return to Philadelphia in 1870, he began to paint rowers on the Schuylkill River, a project that synthesized the elements of his prior training and reflected an idiosyncratic and ambitious new approach to plotting space.

The most well-studied of Eakins's perspective drawings are his designs for *The Pair-Oared Shell* of 1872.<sup>10</sup> These include a line drawing that outlines the boat and a pier behind it and a second study that incorporates watercolor and plots reflections in the water based on the angle of the sun. Eakins typically divided the components of the painting in this manner and also drew ground plans and cross-section views, as we shall see below

Both perspective drawings for *The Pair-Oared Shell* are structured by an underlying foreshortened grid, which was Eakins's first step in plotting the space of his pictures on paper. The foreshortened grid was a traditional Albertian starting point; descriptive geometry and mechanical drawing entered the process later on. The numbers given to each horizontal in the grid represent the increasing distance (in feet) between that register of space and the viewer. The first number on [*Perspective Drawing for "The Pair-Oared Shell" A*] at bottom center—16—positions Eakins at 16 feet from the nearest edge of the represented space. In between the artist and this represented space lies the picture plane. The distance from Eakins to the picture plane is the important "distance from picture," in this case 16 feet, that determines the rate at which the 1-foot wide horizontal registers diminish as they recede into the distance.<sup>11</sup>

The diagonal lines intersecting these horizontals are drawn from regular intervals on the bottom edge of the sheet, with each representing 1 foot of space parallel to the surface of the picture. All these diagonals converge at the viewpoint (also known as the eyepoint, point of sight, or vanishing point), which lies in the center of the composition on the horizon line, and represents the position of the viewer's eye in relation to the scene.

The height of the horizon line was an important choice that could give the effect of a bird's eye, worm's-eye, or straight-ahead view. Eakins often chose to place his horizon line near the middle of his perspectives, as he does here, providing a straightforward view of his subjects. There are also many instances in Eakins's career where he dramatically manipulated the height of the horizon line to achieve bold effects.<sup>12</sup>

Eakins almost always noted the height of the horizon line and "distance from picture" on his perspectives. These dimensions, along with the artist's carefully calculated reflections and refractions based on the angle of

the sun, have encouraged scholars to reconstruct his position as artist and viewer and the time of day depicted. Theodor Siegl, for example, estimated that Eakins's view of *The Pair-Oared Shell* placed him 30 1/2 feet away from the boat at 7:20 p.m. in early June or mid-July.<sup>13</sup>

Once Eakins had foreshortened the space of his scene, he proceeded to plot the coordinates of his objects into it, as though he were a cartographer mapping topographical features onto a grid of latitudes and longitudes. For example, in his study of reflections for *The Pair-Oared Shell*, he noted the following coordinates near the upper margin, left of center:

top John's head from	16 ft to 25 ft reflection
Barney	17 ft to 25 " "
Side of boat from	28 37 "
centre oar at outrigger	23 32"
Top shirt John	19 28
Top corner oar	25 1/2 29
Centre of cloud	36

and below:

Port outrigger reflection from	34 to 44
Starboard "	33 to 40

In his *Perspective Studies for John Biglin in a Single Scull* Eakins noted similar measured dimensions in French: signifying his continuing sense of connection with Gérôme and Paris:

Limité des reflets dans les vagues	
haut de la chemise	24 . . .
. . . tête	22 ~
Genou	28 ~ 17
point d'appuis de l'aviron	29 18
haut de la boutte du canot	32 1/2 21 <sup>14</sup>

In order to determine these coordinates, Eakins had to know the exact measurements of his subjects, a practice considered unnecessary by most American teachers of artistic perspective, who trained the eye to judge distances and dimensions proportionally. Eakins used several methods to ensure that his fastidious measurements of boats, rowers, and distances were translated accurately into his picture.

At the left of the first perspective study for *The Pair-Oared Shell* are three pyramid shaped meshes of diagonal lines. The first of these on the left was used as an internal projection of the distance point that determined the scale of foreshortening to a refined degree. Similar fine meshes of lines drawn to the viewpoint could also be used to facilitate extremely precise measurements. Eakins described their use in his treatise:

A foot though is a rather coarse measure for fine things, so we had better divide up some of the square feet into inches.

Let us take the foot on the 24 ft. line from 0 to 1 left, and divide it into 12 equal parts to represent inches, and run lines from the divisions up to the point of sight. This gives us the apparent size of inches at all distances from the eye.

Again draw diagonals across these feet to be able to measure inches forwards from the eye as well as sideways.<sup>15</sup>

Later in his treatise, Eakins advised students on the creation of a “diagonal scale” with which to measure tenths and hundredths of inches.<sup>16</sup> A diagonal scale is evident at center in his second study for *The Pair-Oared Shell*. Both these methods again reveal a fidelity to the minute dimensions of subjects more in keeping with drawings by engineers than with artists’ studies. Although Eakins’s system was based on a traditional foreshortened grid, rather than on descriptive geometry, his detail and precision in measurement were a departure from traditional “artistic” and modern notions of perspective.

Eakins’s perspective treatise reveals why he chose a system so more meticulous than the norm. Assigning his students the problem of putting a round topped table into perspective, he advised:

The sketch you make of anything to be put in perspective should always be figured by measures of the principal parts, and to choose the principal parts we must follow the mind of the cabinet maker who constructed it. He wished a table 29 inches high & 30 wide with 3 legs spreading 13 inches from the centre to give it just that much steadiness.<sup>17</sup>



The advice to “follow the mind of the cabinet maker” clearly signals the lingering influences of Eakins’s training in mechanical drawing.

*Plan and Cross-Section for Oarsmen on the Schuylkill* and *Perspective and Plan for The Schreiber Brothers* are further reminders of Eakins’s training as a mechanical draftsman and demonstrate the influence of descriptive geometry on his methods. These preparatory sheets include ground plans of the shells as viewed from above. Such plans, as we have seen, were an important element of descriptive geometry and mechanical drawing. Eakins strongly advocated this type of study:

A ground plan is a map of anything looking down on it, drawn to any convenient scale, and should almost always be drawn on paper before putting things into perspective.<sup>18</sup>

One can see in the studies for both *Oarsmen on the Schuylkill* and *The Schreiber Brothers* how measurements recorded in notations were then plotted on the gridded ground plan. In the study for *Oarsmen*, the ground plan was skewed to represent the oblique angle of the boat to the picture plane.

Eakins may have been rigorous in his perspectival plotting, but he was also practical and efficient. Rather than use a system based entirely on descriptive geometry, as Gérôme’s draftsman might have done, he plotted the coordinates resulting from his plan into a foreshortened grid. This system combined perspective’s ability to give the “looks of the thing” using just one view with the precise measurements of mechanical drawing that made construction possible. Reflections, waves, and objects all could be measured and plotted into the space of the grid.

Further evidence of Eakins’s efficiency and preference for directness is his avoidance of complex spatial contrivances such as Gérôme designed in *Hail Caesar!*<sup>19</sup> Even when he chose difficult problems, as, for example, in his sailing pictures, he trusted his system to accommodate forms tilted in several planes:

You now readily perceive that by a series of . . . measurements, we could point by point construct a perspective drawing of anything which we could measure.

You can see too how to overcome the difficulty of drawing a slanting post, which does not come directly under our universal perspective rule.

We would measure its top point first, how far off from the eye, how far to the right or left of our central plane, & then put it in perspective. Then we would measure the bottom point in the same way, and construct it; and, having the picture of these two points of the slanting post, we would draw a line from one to the other for the picture of the post.<sup>20</sup>

Later in his treatise, Eakins also demonstrated a method of circumscribing curved lines and forms within boxes, so that these typically vexing subjects also could be transferred easily onto the perspective grid.<sup>21</sup> A good example of this technique is found in the study of oars in the *Perspective Drawing for The Biglin Brothers Turning the Stake*. Eakins's combination of perspective styles, traditional and mechanical, was more efficient than descriptive geometry, for it obviated the need for a ground plan below. Moreover, it was more quantifiable, appealing to Eakins's instinct for creating drawings that could serve as blueprints for their subjects.

### Art and Science in Perspective Drawings for the Rowing Series

Eakins's particular combination of artistic and scientific interests yielded enigmatic results in all aspects of his career. Despite Eakins's fidelity to the dimensions of his subjects, neither his perspective drawings nor his final pictures are painted versions of a literally "realistic" point of view. Rather, the aesthetics of pictorial design competed with the artist's desire for measurable accuracy throughout the compositional process.

As we saw in the drawings for *The Pair-Oared Shell*, Eakins almost always inscribed the height of the horizon line and distance from the picture on his sheet. These dimensions determined the scale of foreshortening in his overall spatial composition. If someone was meant to be seen at 50 feet away from a high vantage point, that person would appear smaller and in a "flatter" space than if seen at 12 feet straight ahead.

The specificity of the dimensions recorded in Eakins's drawings implies that they are exact representations of his position as a viewer of the scene he presents, as Theodor Siegl assumed. This is not the case, however. In plotting the space of *The Pair-Oared Shell* and other boating scenes, including *The Champion Single Sculls*, Eakins manipulated the dimensions of the eye's "distance from picture" so that the boats loom larger within the composition than they could when seen from the artist's actual position on the shoreline.<sup>22</sup> He writes:

To fix the distance [from the picture to the eye] you consider how large you want one of your important objects to be in the picture; if you want it life size in the picture, your drawing must be distant from the eye as far as that object. If you wish any object to be in the picture half as big as real, you must place your picture plane at half the distance from the eye of that object, if quarter as big, quarter the way & so on.<sup>23</sup>

As this statement demonstrates, the sizes of objects in the picture are manipulated for aesthetic purposes simply by moving a fictionalized picture plane, rather than by relocating the actual eye.

Altering the distance of the picture plane from the subject easily allowed Eakins to enlarge or reduce the scale of his figures. If he was 30 feet from an object, and presumed the picture plane to be at 3 feet from his eye, the objects would be 30:1 divided by 3:1, equaling a ratio of 10:1. A boat in the scene would be one-tenth its actual size. If Eakins decided that the boat was too large, he could fictionally move the picture plane to 2 feet away and render the boat at one-fifteenth its actual size, and so on.

Eakins's use of this technique had a substantial impact on the pictorial effects of his pictures, even if they remained, according to his system, faithful in the reality of his subjects.<sup>24</sup> In Eakins's system, we become "close-up" viewers of the scene, while the ratios determining the rate at which things become smaller in the distance are calculated for a much more distant eyepoint, based on where Eakins might actually have stood. In analyzing *The Paired-Oared Shell*, Theodor Siegl noted

A strange flattening of the . . . perspective drawing [and] the final painting. The space is compressed; the boat and the pier look flatter and closer together than one would expect, much as in a photograph taken with a telephoto lens. The reason is that Eakins placed his point of distance (the vanishing point for the diagonals) unusually far away. Traditionally, the implied space of the vanishing point is at a distance from the center of the painting equal to the width of the canvas. In *The Paired-Oared Shell*, however, the implied distance of the vanishing point is about twice as great, with the result that the painting appears condensed, as if it were the center of a much larger composition.<sup>25</sup>

Clearly, Eakins gave priority to composition, rather than to a strict record of his actual visual experience. He also felt free to crop or extend the margins of his images after his numerical calculations were completed, as we see in his drawings and three paintings of the Biglin brothers and in *John Biglin in a Single Scull*.<sup>26</sup>

### Linear Perspective in the Finished Pictures

By the time Eakins completed his perspective drawings, he knew a great deal about his subjects and the spatial interrelationships he intended to depict. *Perspective Studies for John Biglin in a Single Scull* is nearly twice as large as the finished watercolor, indicating the importance of Eakins mathematical preparations. After completing his perspectives, however, Eakins dramatically switched gears from a linear to a painterly mode. Having incised his perspectival notations onto the blank painting ground, he then scumbled, washed, brushed, and glazed paint over them until they were no more than a faint substructure. Elements such as focus, tone, and hue, which contribute to spatial composition, were often boldly disunited from the underlying linear scheme. In *The Champion Single Sculls*, for example, improbable strokes of bright red and white in a canoe and steamer at the middle of the painting provide both greater tonal contrast and more intense hue than one would expect to see in the background of a perspectival painting; the bridge above is painted with much greater clarity than the landscape elements and water yards in front of it. Large, gestural, and sparkling white clouds appear to sit directly on the surface of the canvas.

Had Eakins merely colored between the lines of his perspectives and followed all the 'rules' of spatial composition, his works would not hold the same fascination for us. The tensions between his linear and painterly modes have been seen in many lights, but always as embodying a set of dualistic impulses. American vs. French, science vs. art, rationalism vs. passion, writing vs. drawing, realism vs. Impressionism.<sup>27</sup> Even Eakins's perspective drawings for the rowing series, long taken as manifestations of a purely mathematical agenda, demonstrate the shifting balances which make his work so exhilarating.

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1 Theodor Siegl has made these analyses for *Perspective Drawing for The Pair-Oared Shell*; see *Philadelphia; Three Centuries of American Art*, exh. cat. (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1976), pp. 391-393. For an extended discussion of Eakins's perspectival and mechanical drawings, see Kathleen A. Foster, *Thomas Eakins Rediscovered* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).

- 2 "[Thirty-Ninth through Forty-Third] Annual Reports of the Controllers of the Public Schools of the First District of Pennsylvania," Philadelphia, 1858-61.
- 3 The substance of Central's curriculum in linear perspective is unclear. We do know, however, that Eakins scored well on a difficult examination in perspective shortly after graduation from Central, indicating that he had achieved a high level of competence in this discipline. For an excellent discussion of this examination, see Elizabeth Johns, "Drawing Instruction at Central High School and Its Impact on Thomas Eakins," *Winterthur Portfolio* 15 (Summer 1980), pp. 139-49.
- 4 Cornu was a French civil engineer whose textbook was translated by Central High School's first principal, Alexander Dallas Bache; see A. Cornu, *Course of Linear Drawing Applied to the Drawing of Machinery* (Philadelphia: J. Dobson, 1842).
- 5 Thomas Eakins, "Linear Perspective," unpublished lecture, p. 34, based on Eakins's Perspective lectures at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in the early 1880s, PMA (which also has a typed transcript). Darrel Sewell, curator of American art at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, kindly allowed me to study the manuscript over a period of several weeks.
- 6 Martin Kemp, *The Science of Art: Optical Themes in Western Art from Brunelleschi to Seurat* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), p. 224.
- 7 Marianne Marcussen, "L'évolution de la perspective linéaire au XIXe siècle en France," *Hafnia: Copenhagen Papers in the History of Art* 7 (1980), pp. 51-73.
- 8 Perspective played a limited formal role in the curriculum of the École des Beaux-Arts in the 1860s, largely because it was considered a prerequisite for study. Students wishing to fully matriculate were required to pass a four-hour examination in perspective. Although admitted to the École, Eakins never formally matriculated, and there is no evidence that he took this examination. If he attended the optional weekly lectures on perspective, he never mentioned it. For examinations at the École, see H. Barbara Weinberg, *The Lure of Paris* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1991), p. 16.
- 9 Kathleen A. Foster, in John Wilmerding, ed. *Thomas Eakins and the Heart of American Life*. Exh. cat. London: National Portrait Gallery, 1993, p. 69, writes that Gérôme "probably would have hired a draughtsman to prepare his perspective schemes."
- 10 For an excellent recent discussion of this series, see Foster, in Wilmerding 1993, pp. 68-70.
- 11 I wish to extend sincere thanks to Kathleen Foster for clarifying this point in editorial comments.
- 12 As, for example, in *Baby at Play* (National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.); see Jules David Prown, "Thomas Eakins' *Baby at Play*," *Studies in the History of Art* 18 (1984), pp. 121-27.
- 13 Siegl, *Philadelphia: Three Centuries*, pp. 391-93.
- 14 "Boundaries of the reflections in the waves"
 

height of the	shirt	24 . . .	
	head	22 ~	
	knee	28 ~	17
fulcrum of the oar		29	18
height of the tip of the shell		32 1/2	21"
- 15 Eakins, "Linear Perspective," p. 11.
- 16 *Ibid.*, pp. 19-20.

17 Ibid., p. 17.

18 Ibid., p. 13.

19 Although Eakins never attempted the complex combination of oblique, tilted, and curving forms in *Hail Caesar!*, he by no means chose an easy route in his own work. As Kathleen Foster writes (in Wilmerding 1993, p. 70): "No two paintings in the series (aside from watercolor replicas) had the same eye level, or the same figure scale, the same angle of recession for the shell, or the same ratio of viewing distance (from the spectator to the painting) to object distance (from the spectator to the figures)."

20 Eakins, "Linear Perspective," p. 7.

21 Ibid., p. 32. This method appears in Peale's *Graphics*, as well as in numerous other nineteenth-century drawing manuals.

22 Elizabeth Johns, *The Heroism of Modern Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), p. 20, notes that in *The Champion Single Sculls*, Eakins "pulled the bridges considerably closer to the viewer than they appear in actuality."

23 Eakins, "Linear Perspective," p. 5.

24 I avoid judging Eakins's system as "correct" or "incorrect" because such judgment assumes that there is only one correct linear perspective system. Nothing could be further from the truth. From the time of Alberti, artists have relied far more on idiosyncratic methods such as Eakins's than on theoretical treatises (many of which disagree in any event). The sciences of perceptual psychology and optics further demonstrate the inability of linear perspective to ever "correctly" describe vision. Eakins's drawings and paintings are better evaluated against the laws of perspective he recounts in his own text.

25 Siegl, *Philadelphia: Three Centuries*, pp. 392–93.

26 In a letter of 1875, Eakins noted that he preferred his painting of *The Schrieber Brothers* to the Biglin pictures, which he found "wanting in distance & some other qualities." He might have been referring here to compositional changes made after the perspective drawings were completed. Thomas Eakins to Earl Shinn, March 26, 1875, FHL; quoted in Lloyd Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins*, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press for National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 1982), I, p. 121.

27 H. Barbara Weinberg, Michael Fried, and Kathleen Foster have all put forth powerful models for explaining these tensions.

# Thomas Eakins and the Male Nude in French Vanguard Painting, 1850–1890

RICHARD R. BRETTELL, 1996

Thomas Eakins ended a lengthy and seminal stay in France and on the Continent with a visit to the Salon of 1870.<sup>1</sup> While there, he almost certainly saw a revolutionary painting of male bathers by the young French artist Frédéric Bazille, who just months later was to be killed in a battle during the Franco-Prussian War. Eakins probably never met Bazille, who operated in very different—and more aesthetically advanced—circles than the American, but there is no doubt that Eakins was thoroughly prepared for Bazille's awkward but powerful work. Indeed, the brilliant American had already lamented contemporary representations of the nude by 1867, his first full year in France, in a letter written after he had seen the immense—and, from all accounts, immensely dull—exhibition of painting held in the International Exhibition of that year. “The French court has become very decent since Eugenie [the Spanish-born empress of France] had fig leaves put on all the statues in the Tuileries. When a man paints a naked woman he gives her less than poor nature did. I can conceive of few circumstances wherein I would have to paint a naked woman, but if I did, I would not mutilate her for double the money. She is the most beautiful thing there is—except a naked man, but I never saw a study of one exhibited—It would be a godsend to see a fine man painted in a studio with bare walls. . . . I hate affectation.”<sup>2</sup>

It was the simple honesty of painted representation that appealed to Eakins, and surely that honesty must have struck him when he saw Bazille's *Summer Scene* [1869, Harvard Art Museum/Fogg Museum]. For both young artists, as for many of their generation trained in France, the quintessential subject of classical sculpture, the nude, presented a continuing challenge to the art of painting, and, in order to succeed as a painter, representational mastery over the human body was vital. Eakins's own greatest painting of male nudes, *Swimming*, was completed more than a decade later and has few stylistic relationships to Bazille's work. Yet each work struggles to define a role in painting for both the contemporary nude and the male nude.

The female nude dominates what we now call the discourse surrounding the origins of modern European painting.<sup>3</sup> The history of modern art begins with Manet's female nudes of 1865, and discussions of class, sex (or,

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Richard R. Brettell, “Thomas Eakins and the Male Nude in French Vanguard Painting, 1850–1890,” in *Thomas Eakins and the Swimming Picture*, ed. Doreen Bolger and Sarah Cash (Fort Worth, Texas: Amon Carter Museum, 1996), 80–97. Abridged. Reprinted by permission of the Amon Carter Museum and the author.

rather, sexism), commodification, sources, “style,” and other issues that emerge from repeated analyses of *Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe* and *Olympia* (both Musée d’Orsay, Paris) dominate our very idea of pictorial modernism.<sup>4</sup> The extraordinary advances made in feminist art history have centered on the interpretation of the female nude, and one can scarcely imagine the most trenchant work of Linda Nochlin, Griselda Pollock, Norma Broude, Tamar Garb, Kathleen Adler, and others without images of female nudity.<sup>5</sup> “Sexism” and the sexuality of human discourse in art seems optimally inscribed on the nude (or naked) female body.

Yet, oddly enough, a good many of the most powerful and ambiguous vanguard paintings of the nude made in the 1860s, 1870s, and 1880s represent not the female, but the male nude, and very few of these works have been subjected to the kind of rigorously critical analysis reserved for representations of women. Indeed, in a direct descent from Courbet’s *Wrestlers* of 1855 [Szépművészeti Museum, Budapest], modern artists have created images of male nudes (or almost nudes) that should be analyzed in terms analogous to their better-known images of the female nude. One can immediately cite works by Corot, Puvis de Chavannes, Degas, Couture, Renoir, Bazille, Cézanne, Caillebotte, Gauguin, and Manet in French art alone—and examples from Liebermann to Von Marées or Munch outside the French national tradition.<sup>6</sup>

These works, however, must be considered a hidden tradition,<sup>7</sup> because many were neither exhibited nor published during the lifetimes of their artists, and others were greeted with such controversy, even in progressive circles, that their appearances were suppressed. Exemplifying the first approach are Degas’s two large paintings *Young Spartans Exercising* ([National Gallery, London] and a monochrome version in the Art Institute of Chicago).<sup>8</sup> . . . Although all Degas scholars suggest that the paintings were begun about 1860, only the larger of the two versions was finished for exhibition in 1880, twenty years after its genesis; for reasons we shall never know, Degas failed to include it in the fifth Impressionist exhibition itself, although it is listed in the catalogue.<sup>9</sup> Was this the artist’s own suppression of his work? Degas, who seems never to have exhibited a male nude, may have lost his nerve when it came time to show this powerful work that deals directly with the training and cultural significance of the body. . . .

An example of the second sort of suppression is Gustave Caillebotte’s masterful *Man at Bath* of 1884 [Josefowitz Collection]. This superb work, among the masterpieces of Caillebotte’s short career, was sent in 1888 to the vanguard exhibition of Les XX in Brussels, where, in spite of



the progressive aims of the organizers, it seems to have excited such controversy that it was moved to a closet or locked room outside the exhibition proper.<sup>10</sup> . . . And, as all students of Eakins's career have shown, the controversy that swirled around the American master reached its zenith at the time he painted his only great representation of the male nude, *Swimming*.

How and why did this tradition develop when it did? It is a truism to say that the male nude is the central subject of Western sculpture and that, from the Greeks onward, nudity was considered more appropriate to male subjects than to female ones. There is, for example, no full scale-nude female in Greek sculpture of the sixth century B.C., despite the fact that there are literally hundreds of full-scale nude male figures. . . . However, by the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, female nudity fully entered the realm of painting, sharing it equally with male nudes well into the seventeenth century, when male nudity in both painting and sculpture began a long, slow decline.

By the middle of the nineteenth century male nudity was reserved for select scenes of classical history or for religious paintings of the death of Christ, St. Sebastian, and other martyrs. There were exceptions, but few, suggesting that, by 1800, male nudity signified the past in its various classical guises. . . .

The first major vanguard painting that dealt forcefully—and officially—with the male nude in a contemporary setting was Frédéric Bazille's *Summer Scene*.<sup>11</sup> Painted in 1869–70, it was accepted (to the surprise of its maker) in the Salon of 1870. . . . *Summer Scene* can be read as Bazille's response to the larger wrestlers of Courbet, whom Bazille had met by the spring of 1866 and with whom he remained on good terms throughout his life.<sup>12</sup> The “embedded tradition,” of the male nude is pushed to America because Thomas Eakins probably saw Bazille's painting at the Salon of 1870.

For this reason, Eakins's American painting *Swimming*, of 1885, engages directly with a newly emerging European tradition that took on added force in the 1870s, when Cézanne began to paint male bathers almost obsessively. Few American paintings of the nineteenth century play important roles in sequences of major works of European art, and Eakins's *Swimming* is one of those few. It is the intention of this essay to place the work in a larger history of art rather than the American history to which it is most often relegated. The sequence of male nudes by Courbet, Bazille, and Eakins can be seen as a real sequence of works that demand to be interpreted both in regard to one another and as a cumulative response to a tradition of painting that gave privilege to the female nude as the carrier of meaning for

male artists and male viewers. Courbet, Bazille, and Eakins had the courage to confront issues relating to the body by using the male body. They also created powerful images of male bodies for public exhibitions at which members of both sexes and all ages could freely analyze these images. The wrestling men and all-male swimming were wrenched from the complete privacy that they occupied in actual life and were liberated or opened to public scrutiny through representation. Was this maneuver any less radical—either aesthetically or socially—than Manet's liberation of the naked courtesan from her position of dominated privacy or from the corners of the bois de Boulogne to the Salon itself?

The answer, unfortunately, is yes. We know from counting column inches of criticism that Manet's confrontational courtesans were infinitely more shocking to French, European, and American viewers of the Salon des Refusés in 1865 and the Salon of 1865 than the (almost) nude men of Bazille were in the Salon of 1870. Perhaps because of this, they remain dominating today. Yet, it must be remembered that Eakins lost his job at the Pennsylvania Academy over issues of morality and freedom foreshadowed in *Swimming* and that Caillebotte's greatest male nude was actually censored from a major exhibition of vanguard art. Given this, we must ask an obvious question. Had Bazille's bathers in *Summer Scene* actually been nude, as he planned them to be, and had the painting been shown at a Salon when the French were less distracted by politics and economics than they were in the late spring and early summer of 1870, would the history of modern art have been differently written?<sup>13</sup> Sadly, we shall never know because Bazille lost his nerve and covered what would have been the offending genitalia with trunks, and, within months, the French were at war with the Prussians, rendering issues that would have consumed all Paris in 1865 marginal in 1870. Indeed, Bazille himself was dead within five months of the exhibition of *Summer Scene*.

Given his oft-quoted comment about the ultimate beauty of the male body, Eakins must have been struck by the naturalism and utter frankness of Bazille's bathers. There were not many representations of the male nude that could compete with Bazille's in the Salon.<sup>14</sup> Eakins's command of the French language was excellent, but it is unlikely that he read the gushy but fascinating descriptive analysis of Bazille's painting by Manet's and Degas's friend Zacharie Astruc, or the more measured passage by Edmond Duranty, who would go on to champion the young Impressionists in his brilliant review of their 1876 exhibition.<sup>15</sup> Eakins had too little time to keep up with the critics and probably was preoccupied with the arrangements for his own return to the United States after more than two years in Europe. Yet, perhaps he did

see the widely circulated caricature of Bazille's painting by Bertall in *Le Journal Amusant*, which, in itself, raises fascinating issues about the representation of desire in works of art.<sup>16</sup> . . .

Few visitors to the 1870 Salon could have missed *Summer Scene* when it made its only nineteenth-century appearance. At once large and vividly colored, it must have virtually screamed from the walls of the Salon galleries. Its size was calculated for a favorable hanging—at once large enough to play a major role on a wall, square so that it would most likely have been centered on the wall, and small enough to prevent its being “skied,” as were canvases of truly immense size. When we compare it to a highly successful, but slightly earlier, Salon painting dealing with male nudity by Henri Regnault . . . , the real originality—and the “naturalness”—of Bazille's seemingly contrived composition becomes clear. Regnault's *Automedon with the Horses of Achilles* [1868, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston] ensured the reputation of its young painter with its powerful figure, its extraordinary horses, and its post Romantic swagger.<sup>17</sup> . . .

In painting *Summer Scene*, Bazille set himself a series of pictorial problems that would have made Regnault wince—the integration of eight separately observed male figures (one mostly immersed in the water) in a light-filled landscape that is itself as visually interesting and varied as the figures. . . . Several letters <sup>18</sup> . . . [support] a reading of the painting as a study of male nudity in which the subject of bathing is largely a pretext for . . . nudity.

When considered in this light, the most remarkable aspect of the finished painting is that none of the figures is actually nude. Clearly, Bazille dithered over this—of the seven figures in the most resolved of the compositional drawings (Paris, Musée du Louvre, Département des Arts Graphiques, R.F. 29731), only the largest in the foreground is wearing bathing trunks.<sup>19</sup> . . . [W]e shall never know quite why Bazille decided to dress his figures in bathing costumes, as a cross examination of the painting makes clear that he did. . . . I know of no other cases in the oeuvres of other artists in which figures in a Salon painting were painted nude and then “clothed” in paint. Perhaps Bazille made such a prudish decision because his last painting of a male bather, *Fisherman with a Net* [1868, Foundation Rau pour le Tiers-monde, Zurich], had been completely nude and had been rejected by the Salon jury in 1869. . . .

. . . The figures in Bazille's painting are arranged in three distinct planes that recede into space. Their setting, a meadow surrounded by birch trees and bordered by a pool, is placed within the agricultural landscape of western Provence, where the painter's family lived. In spite of the unity of the landscape setting, the figures are treated separately and placed in the setting

in ways that emphasize their discontinuities. The full-scale figure in the left foreground has often been linked to figures of St. Sebastian, the male body that seems to be the site of the greatest homoerotic fantasizing in Christian art.<sup>20</sup> . . . The central figure seems literally to have emerged from the water, and only his shoulders and head are in air. Of all the figures, he seems most like a boy or an adolescent, and his evident youth actually alters our reading of the painting. What at first appears to be a group of young male friends on an outing gradually becomes a group of young men, who may or may not be together, sharing the field and the pond with a boy. The very discontinuity among the figures strengthens an interpretation of shared rather than collective activity, and the fact that they are not nude, but wearing swimming trunks, gives the setting the quality of a quasi-public place. . . .

Only one of the main figures in *Summer Scene* (the boy immersed in water) would, if unclothed, be . . . decorous. . . . Every one of the seven remaining figures would have exposed genitalia, and, to make matters even more uncomfortable, most of the figures are placed in the immediate foreground of the composition, where their position with respect to the beholder does not allow for many forms of “distancing.” Fortunately, Bazille helps us by clothing all of these figures in bathing trunks and by creating a situation in which none of them engage the beholder and only a few engage each other. This dispersal of gazes—both internally and externally—is one aspect of the painting’s complex aesthetics. It is as if Bazille anxiously presents a summer scene of almost unparalleled physicality and immediacy and then, as if afraid of his very achievement, pulls the scene apart into various disconnected sub-scenes, each independent of the others. The mental and physical worlds of each figure or figural group are juxtaposed rather than unified, resulting in a work of art of perplexing discontinuity.

The very effect of this painting is to force the beholder to gaze separately at each figure and, thus, to do something in looking at the painting that one would not do in life—to gaze for some time at contemporary nude or partially clothed male figures. Indeed, young men who swim, wrestle, and sun together out-of-doors are permitted to touch each other only in forms of combat or support and are never encouraged actually to look at one another. In this painting, the beholder is placed in the awkward situation of being a voyeur of a scene that, through representation, raises challenging questions about the beauty of the actual male body. . . .

The only scholar to confront directly the issue of homoeroticism and Bazille was Kermit Champa in his review of the 1978 Bazille exhibition at the Art Institute of Chicago. . . . Champa recognized *Summer Scene* as a signal to

the world—perhaps an unconscious signal—of the painter’s homosexual tendencies. His words bear quotation, not because he presents any basis in written documents, but because they are among the few frank—and frankly sexual—interpretations of a major modern painting as homoerotic:

Like Courbet, Bazille responds both to the titillating fact of pictured nudity and the secondary voyeuristic excitement of watching pictured titillation. Since Bazille’s preferences were pretty clearly oriented more toward men than women, it is not surprising that *Summer Scene* is much richer in innuendoes than *Toilette* [the orientalist female nude rejected by the Salon jury in 1870]. Further, if one can imagine the image without bathing suits (at least some of which are later retouches, I currently suspect, pending X-rays of the canvas) the range of innuendo becomes positively alarming. Bazille . . . had in *Summer Scene* approached a conceptual and psychological shadowy area, bordered on one side by fact and on the other by personal fantasy purporting to be external fact.<sup>21</sup>

Although this is certainly possible, one might even say likely, there is no actual evidence beyond the painting itself to support this view. And in an age in which verbal documentation is crucial to the establishment of art-historical proof, this purely visual analysis is, perhaps, insufficient. Yet one suspects, given the pictorial context in which *Summer Scene* is set, that Champa is correct. Like most young artists in the nineteenth century, Bazille cut his teeth by representing the nude model, mostly male, and then turned to representing the nude woman. . . .

Here, one confronts the central problem in interpreting Bazille’s painting—and also the central reason why, despite the numerous stylistic differences between it and Eakins’s *Swimming*, it is so clearly the prototype for Eakins’s experiments in the mid-1880s. No earlier painting known to Eakins had the same combination of sublimated or fantasist homoeroticism and sheer realism as Bazille’s oddly unsatisfying painting of 1869–70. Eakins was, in many senses, ready for Bazille’s painting at the Salon of 1870, but in other, more profound, senses, he needed more than a decade before he could himself find a situation in which his life experiences, a commission, and his teaching could free him enough to represent the nude male in a contemporary setting.

In fact, the examples of Delacroix, Manet, and, more immediately,

Bonnat allowed Eakins first to represent the male nude as the crucified Christ. This painting, one of a long series of representations of the nearly nude Christ, could not be shocking simply because of the nudity of the figure. The relative moral “safety” of this condition allowed Eakins to deal with the nude male subject in relative freedom. However, it was only with the Coates commission . . . and with his seemingly unassailable position with his students that Eakins found a situation in which he could treat the contemporary male nude in the manner of Bazille.

Many scholars have worried about the meanings of Eakins’s male nudes, turning, as early as Hendricks in 1974, to a consideration of the painter’s own sexuality as the possible explanation for the painting, but few students of European art have made similar efforts to explain the male nudes of Courbet, Degas, Bazille, Renoir, Cézanne, Caillebotte, and Gauguin. Of course, no one could even utter the word homosexuality in a discussion of Courbet, Renoir, or Gauguin, but, in point of fact, the sexual practices of none of the other artists are clearly established, and, as is evident from a close reading of Gauguin’s texts, even this fabled heterosexual was not immune from homosexual impulses. We know from Whitney Davis’s complex and sophisticated interpretation of the homoerotic—or rather, homosocial—content of Eakins’s nudes of the 1880s that an artist’s actual sexual practice and what Davis inelegantly calls the “discharge” of desire through picture making are two different things, and this might well be the case for other artists whose private lives remain private despite the invasive tactics of modern historians.<sup>22</sup> . . .

. . . One must also remember that Bazille was close to Cézanne, who, although he had not yet painted any of his canvases of male bathers, had already begun to fantasize about his own youthful excursions with Émile Zola and others in the countryside around Aix.<sup>23</sup> The fact that these two young men—Bazille and Cézanne—were from Provence, wealthy, and struggling to define both their profession and their personal lives, all the while maintaining strong links with their families, created another bond that can, in many senses, explain just why Bazille decided to paint a Salon painting of male nudes and to pair it with what he expected to be a more socially acceptable painting of a female nude in an appropriately distanced orientalist context. . . .

After Bazille’s premature death in the Franco-Prussian war, he became a minor hero for the avant-garde, but in little more than a year he was forgotten as the young men and women reconvened after the war and the Commune to form the group of independent artists known today as

Impressionists. Yet, Bazille's last major painting had a long afterlife. Indeed, it can be argued that *Summer Scene* is the first of a group of paintings that includes not only Eakins's masterpiece of 1884–85 but also Cézanne's male bathers.<sup>24</sup> . . .

Painted with thick, viscous patches of color, Cézanne's earliest completed male bather composition [*Bathers at Rest*, 1875–76, Barnes Foundation, Merion, PA] has all the “southern” optical intensity of its prototype, Bazille's *Summer Scene*. Brilliant greens, yellows, and blues dominate the painting, and even the flesh is filled with colors—yellows, pinks, salmons, reds, lavenders. The figures share with those of Bazille a disconnected quality, as if each were separately observed, transcribed, and, finally, placed in the composition. In analyzing them, writers have tried to find prototypes in the history of art, with candidates for sources ranging from Michelangelo to Gérôme and including sculpture as well as painting.<sup>25</sup> Yet, in each case, Cézanne consumed the appropriated source so completely that its identity is lost in the final work. In this case, Cézanne's masterpiece differs from its major source, Bazille's *Summer Scene*. Indeed, the general sources of Bazille's figures—St. Sebastian, a reclining river god, Courbet's *Wrestlers*—are so obvious that a visually literate viewer recognizes them with no real effort. For Cézanne, as for Eakins after him, the sources for the poses are not nearly so apparent, and the fact that the painting seems to have had no clear sources is part of its stubborn originality. What is most surprising about this situation is that, while Bazille's figures wear their sources almost as forthrightly as they wear bathing costumes, his painting has a much more immediate contemporaneity than do the “classical” concoctions of either Cézanne or Eakins. In both cases, this classicism has two components—the first relates to the balanced and figurally oriented compositions of each work, and the second has to do with the relative absence in Cézanne and the absolute absence in Eakins of contemporary clothing.

It is clear that, for both Eakins and Cézanne, Bazille's *Summer Scene* had opened the door for their later—and independent—investigations of the male nude out-of-doors. Each of them brought different training, temperament, and psychology to the task of transcribing the contemporary male nude, but each clearly had a compelling need to do so. For Cézanne, that need continued throughout the remainder of his life, and there are at least thirty-three painted compositions that deal with the male nude—alone and in various groups—out-of-doors. . . .

Perhaps the closest parallel between Cézanne's *Bathers at Rest* and

Eakins's *Swimming* is that each painting has been related in the literature to the respective artist's lives. Rather than being considered as "ideal" compositions with indirect relationships to contemporary reality, both paintings have consistently been discussed in biographical terms. In Eakins's case, the practice of collective nude activity out-of-doors was a well-known part of his teaching, and, although his motivations for engaging in these activities have been interpreted in a wide variety of ways, the facts of his practice never have. For Cézanne, there has been an equal reliance on biography in "explaining" his male bather compositions. Virtually every writer in the vast Cézanne bibliography alludes to the trips into the countryside around Aix-en-Provence taken with his friends, the future novelist Émile Zola and the future physicist Baptistin Baille. . . .

It would be fascinating to see Bazille's *Summer Scene* and Eakins's *Swimming* in one room—or even in one exhibition. Perhaps, then, we would understand Eakins's choice of a subject associated not with the art of his esteemed teacher, Gérôme, but with the artists that teacher most despised. The recognition of this choice would lead those of us who are Americans to understand the double ambivalence of Eakins as a painter. He was, at once, the first revolutionary force in American figure painting since Copley and a painter who, perhaps because he was provincial, was able to respond only belatedly—and instinctively—to the "bad" work of the most progressive artists in France. Unfortunately for our falsely national history of art, Eakins's supremely complex and difficult painting, *Swimming*, would pale if it hung next to its antisource, Bazille's *Summer Scene*. It is precisely because Eakins listened to—and understood—Gérôme that he was able to understand only the subject of Bazille's painting and was doomed forever to despise the forms, the brushstrokes, and the colors that made that subject truly revolutionary in Bazille's painting.

For Bazille and Cézanne, painting is a battleground in which subject and style—matter and manner—are pitted against each other until both either win or lose. Eakins, in spite of his much-touted innovations in representing reflections or in deriving poses and pictorial situations from photographs, was less experimental as a painter than he was as a man and as a teacher. His use of a middle-tone ground against which to paint values, his carefully balanced and centered grouping of figures, his absolute avoidance of any strong color but the green of the trees—all of these decisions link his art inextricably to that of his own teacher, Gérôme, who did more than any other artist to make sure that vanguard paintings would not be in the Salon. When Gérôme lost in 1870, Eakins benefitted enormously from the very sight



of Bazille's bold—and aggressively unsatisfactory—painting. Unfortunately, when he himself turned to the same subject in *Swimming* in 1884 and 1885, he remembered only the subject and not the style of this important source.

Arthur Danto, our American philosopher of art, has recently written a provocative short essay about the parallels between Eakins's *Swimming* and Georges Seurat's *Bathers at Asnières*.<sup>26</sup> The comparison is far less real—and less interesting as a result—than that between the Eakins and the French paintings that were the actual sources—and antisources—of his work. Yet, in another way, Danto is correct: both Eakins and Seurat were equally “academic” in their conception of painting. Seurat's academic experience was as important for his art as was his well-known (but later than the *Bathers*) friendship with Cézanne and Signac. Eakins, like Seurat, tried to have it both ways, and the entire history of modern art has taught us that one can never succeed by trying to have it both ways. Eakins thought that photography would free him from Gérôme as Seurat thought that color theory would free him from both the Impressionists and the academy, where he felt more at home. Both tried too hard to reconcile too much, and, as their respective bathers look forever sideways, parallel to the picture plane that is, for us, a barrier, we as viewers are reminded that we will never know just what it is that fascinates them. For each artist, the male bathers are contrived to gaze outside of the picture that frames them. What do they see?

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- 1 Gordon Hendricks, *The Life and Work of Thomas Eakins* (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1974), p. 64. For more detailed treatment of Eakins in Paris, see Kathleen A. Foster, “Philadelphia and Paris: Thomas Eakins and the Beaux-Arts” (Master's paper, Yale University, 1972).
  - 2 Hendricks, *The Life and Work of Thomas Eakins*, p. 14
  - 3 The word *modern* is here used in the “old fashioned” sense to connote vanguard or anti-academic painting from 1850 to 1940.
  - 4 The most eloquent and difficult discussion of Manet's nudes can be found in T. J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life, Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers* (New York: Knopf, 1984).
  - 5 The most convenient collection of this enormously rich bibliography can be found in *The Expanding Discourse: Feminism and Art History*, ed. Norma Broude and Mary Gerrard (New York: HarperCollins, 1992). Linda Nochlin's lectures and essays (see *Bathtime, Renoir, Cézanne, Daumier and the Practices of Bathing in Nineteenth-Century France* [Groningen: Gerson Lectures Foundation, 1991]) have rigorously analyzed the ubiquitous female bather in nineteenth-century French art, with its manifold social, psychological, and moral meanings. She has neglected nothing—scientific texts on bathing, hygiene, and athletics, as well as poetry, novels, and moral treatises—to create a verbal discourse for images that range from obscure and unphotographed academic paintings to well known works by Manet and Renoir.

- In most of this literature, men are scarcely mentioned, except reproachfully as the intended viewers for these supremely sexist works. Only Manet is spared the critical contempt of modern feminist critics, mostly because, through controlling the female gaze, he rendered the male viewer self-conscious to such an extraordinary degree that his intention must have been to instill guilt in his well-stuffed bourgeois viewers. Unfortunately, in the absence of Manet's words, we will never know the precise nature of his intentions.
- 6 This essay will concentrate on the part of that tradition that bears immediate comparative impact upon an understanding of Thomas Eakins's *Swimming*. A full treatment of the subject is the proper subject of a dissertation and/or book.
  - 7 To my knowledge, the only modern exhibition in which the subject of male bathing or the male nude in modern art has played any strong role was the *Cézanne Bathers* exhibition of 1988 in Basel.
  - 8 The liveliest recent discussion of this painting that includes all earlier interpretations is Norma Broude, "Edgar Degas and French Feminism, ca. 1880," in *The Expanding Discourse*, pp. 269-280.
  - 9 See Charles S. Moffett, "Disarray and Disappointment: The Fifth Exhibition, 1880," in *The New Painting: Impressionism 1874-1886* (San Francisco: The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 1986), pp. 299-301.
  - 10 The most recent discussion of this provocative painting can be found in Gloria Groom's entry in the exhibition catalogue *Gustave Caillebotte: Urban Impressionist* (New York: Abbeville, 1995), pp. 216-217. Interestingly, two feminist scholars have recently discussed the erotic—or homoerotic—content of this painting. Tamar Garb provoked an audience in a recent lecture at the Art Institute of Chicago, while Julia Bernard took such notions into print in a fascinating article, "Impressionism: Boys' Club," in *Text sur Kunst* 5, no. 17 (February 1995): 168-173.
  - 11 The painting made its most recent appearance in Gary Tinterow and Henri Loyrette, *Origins of Impressionism* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1994), where it was discussed both in the lengthy essay on representations of the nude by Loyrette (pp. 95-123) and in an exemplary entry by Tinterow (pp. 334-335).
  - 12 The meeting is recorded in a letter Bazille wrote to his parents. Bazille's father was involved in the acceptance by the town of Montpellier of the gift of the Bruyas Collection in 1869. The Bruyas Collection was the single most important holding of Courbet's works then in private hands and was well known to the young painter. See *Frédéric Bazille: The Prophet of Impressionism* (Brooklyn: The Brooklyn Museum, 1992), p. 161.
  - 13 The most accessible of the numerous discussions of the French art world before and after the Franco-Prussian War can be found in Paul Tucker, "The First Impressionist Exhibition in Context," in *The New Painting: Impressionism 1874-1886*, pp. 93-117.
  - 14 Unfortunately, only the titles of works in the catalogue can help us to identify other male nudes in the Salon exhibition in 1870, and these are notoriously unreliable as proof. However, due to the prominence of Bertall's caricature of Bazille's painting in *Le Journal Amusant*, we can safely assume that it was the most visibly controversial of these works. Others would have been representations of Christ, St. Sebastian, or one or more classical heroes in battle.

- 15 Zacharie Astruc, "Le Salon de 1870," *L'Écho des Beaux-Arts*, June 12, 1870, pp. 2-3; Edmond Duranty, "Salon de 1870," *Paris-Journal*, May 19, 1870, p. 2.
- 16 For an accessible reproduction of this cartoon, see the exhibition catalogue *Frédéric Bazille, Prophet of Impressionism*, p. 50.
- 17 The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, purchased this major painting by subscription in 1890. It has not been shown for more than a generation and thus plays a role as an academic male nude that, like its vanguard counterparts, has been suppressed by the modern museum and by scholarship. See Alexandra R. Murphy, *European Paintings in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston—An Illustrated Summary Catalogue* (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1985), p. 237. The museum also owns an oil sketch for the painting.
- 18 See J. Patrice Marandel, *Frédéric Bazille and Early Impressionism* (Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago, 1978), no. 75, p. 180. [For letters of 1869, see] François Daulte, *Frédéric Bazille et son temps* (Geneva: Callier, 1952), pp 76-77.
- 19 The most accessible photographs of the surviving drawings related to *Summer Scene* can be found in *Frédéric Bazille, Prophet of Impressionism*, pp. 116-117.
- 20 Dianne Pitman points out that Bazille had already done a drawing of St. Sebastian. She also associates both the standing and the reclining figure on the left with specific sources: a *St. Sebastian* attributed to Jacopo Bassano at the Musée des Beaux-Arts, Dijon, and a *Landscape with a Shepherd Playing a Flute* by Laurent de la Hyre in Montpellier at the Musée Fabre (*Frédéric Bazille: Prophet of Impressionism*, p. 119).
- 21 See Champa's fascinating review in *The Arts*, no. 10 (June 1978): 109-110. Another cryptic, but brilliant, sentence also sheds light on Bazille's imagery: "It was Bazille's anxiousness to address realist painting's most compelling and difficult issues of imagery that allowed him to run so insensitively and with such pictorial persuasiveness through its evolving intricacies of form" (p. 110).
- 22 Whitney Davis, "Erotic Revision in Thomas Eakins's Narratives of Male Nudity," *Art History* 17, no. 3 (September 1994), 301-341, is among the most subtle and brilliant readings in what might be called "latent iconography" in the recent art-historical literature. The only limitation of the essay is the narrowly circumscribed way in which Davis deals with Eakins's life and work, refusing to foray into analogous situations or images outside of Eakins. For a more satisfying reading of Eakins's painting, one must read Randall C. Griffin's stimulating essay, "Thomas Eakins' Construction of the Male Body, or 'Men Get to Know Each Other Across the Space of Time,'" *Oxford Art Journal* 18, no. 2 (Fall 1995), 70-80.
- 23 There are many discussions of Cézanne's early "bathing" outings with Zola and Baptistin Baille. Perhaps the clearest, most recent, and most accessible is found in Lawrence Gowing's brilliant essay, "The Early Work of Paul Cézanne," in *Cézanne: The Early Years, 1859-1872* (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1988), pp.4-7.

- 24** There are fascinating and fruitful comparisons with Eakins in Russian and German painting of the nineteenth century but these fall outside the scope of this essay. Perhaps the most uncanny visual parallels with *Swimming* in nineteenth-century European art can be found in a series of small paintings made in Italy around 1840 by the Russian painter Alexandr Andreevich Ivanov. These represent young boys posing in the nude in vast, almost empty landscapes. The most curious among the group is *Youths on the Shore of the Bay of Naples* in the State Russian Museum, St. Petersburg. Another fascinatingly parallel painting, made in the mid-1870s in both Holland and France by the German artist Max Liebermann, is in the permanent collection of the Dallas Museum of Art. This work combines extensive quotations from classical sculpture and old master painting with up-to-date realist imagery, using the bodies of working class boys as the carriers of these lofty associations. Its presence in Dallas helps to put Eakins's *Swimming* into the larger context of modern art, rather than in the purely American context created for the painting by the Amon Carter Museum's collection. Because the Liebermann has not yet been published by the Dallas Museum of Art, information about it is accessible only in the curatorial files of the museum. An unsigned essay by this author contains a summary of this material.
- 25** This painting has only recently been reproduced in color and discussed in terms of the immense modern literature about Cézanne. See the brilliant entry on it by Joseph J. Rishel in *Great French Paintings from The Barnes Foundation: Impressionist, Post-Modernist, and Early Modern* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, in association with Lincoln University Press, 1993), pp. 102–105, and notes, pp. 300–301.
- 26** Arthur Danto, "Men Bathing, 1883: Eakins and Seurat: Both Subverted What They Believed Was the Task of Art," *ARTNews* 94, no. 3 (March 1995): 95–96.

# Drawing: Thinking Made Visible

KATHLEEN A. FOSTER, 1997

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The rationalization of Eakins's method, which gradually drained many responsibilities from drawing and reassigned them to painting, left the activity of drawing reduced and purified. For Eakins, this distilled identity thrived in the maintenance of the task that it had managed from his schoolboy days and would control until the end of his career: linear perspective. The construction of a perspective drawing is a conceptual, not a visual undertaking, as the typical emptiness of Eakins's drawings makes clear. Generally, figures are invisible, their presence indicated by only a foot-print on the floor or a reflection on the water. Eakins's procedure did not require life study of models or even furniture until later in the development of the picture; at the beginning, a set of overall measurements "boxing" the depicted object could suffice. This detached process accounts, to a large degree, for the appearance of the ghostly figures that do appear, either in the loose, volumetric style, suggesting work from memory or imagination, or in the sharply outlined, flat style, implying copying from a preexisting, two-dimensional source. A perspective grid precedes the figures in both of these kinds of preparatory drawings, early and late, just as it underlies most of the drawings that relate directly to Eakins's paintings. Such pervasiveness suggests the power of perspective in Eakins's method, and its importance to his sense of the fundamental nature of drawing.

## PERSPECTIVE DRAWING

Not a man of words, Eakins cared enough about linear perspective to write a book about the subject. This brief text was designed to accompany his lectures on perspective, mechanical drawing, and the rules of reflection, refraction, and shadows. Although the book was never published, the extant manuscript and illustrations can now be studied to understand the terms of Eakins's teaching, sometimes whimsically based on his own work.<sup>1</sup> His definitions and procedures also give access to his own perspective drawings, allowing us to appreciate the creative choices made in the construction of his paintings and the manipulation of "reality" for artistic purposes that such choices represent.

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Kathleen A. Foster, "Drawing: Thinking Made Visible," in *Thomas Eakins Rediscovered: Charles Bregler's Thomas Eakins Collection at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press for the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, 1997), 51–71, notes 242–45. Excerpts, 59ff. Courtesy of the author.

Linear perspective, discovered or invented during the Renaissance, offers a system for the illusionistic depiction of space and three-dimensional objects on a two-dimensional surface. It is based on the principle that sets of parallel lines will appear to converge and diminish as they move away from the viewer, producing the familiar effect of train tracks that seem to draw closer together in the distance, or the telephone poles that seem to grow shorter as they march toward the horizon. The appearance of convergence or diminution can be represented informally, from observation, but linear perspective provides a method by which changes in scale and contour can be precisely calculated and constructed, almost without recourse to the observed world. Correct operation of this system depends on a fixed relationship between the viewer (or artist), the picture (or drawing), and the objects depicted. Many choices can be made in establishing these positions, but once determined they must be consistently held; if any of these three is altered, the entire image will be affected.

Even from this general description, several qualities of linear perspective reflect upon the character of an artist who faithfully accepts its system. First is the promise of exactness, of geometric, measurable accuracy, an important gift to those, like Eakins, hoping to project the orderliness and truthfulness of science and mathematics onto the endeavor of artistic representation. Second is the necessity for fore-thought, because many aspects of the picture's appearance will be based on or affected by decisions made before the first mark is drawn on the canvas or paper. The master of perspective is an artist with a strong preliminary visualization of his or her subject, and a patient, even enthusiastic affection for planning. Synthetic perspective "may be described as a thoroughgoing attempt to express an experience of visual reality which is only to be gained by a process of introspection, of asking what it is that is really seen," wrote John White. "Paint with your brain as well as your eye," said Eakins.<sup>2</sup>

To understand the principled relationship between viewer, picture, and depicted object, a few definitions are needed, mostly because Eakins's terms have a precise meaning lost to most modern readers, who generally have no more than a train-tracks-and-telephone-poles grasp of the mechanics of linear perspective. The skill is alive today among architects, set designers, commercial draftsmen, mathematicians, and perceptual psychologists, but even this crowd relies increasingly on computer graphics. Artists now are rarely required to learn perspective in their schools, and most art historians are both uninformed and slightly apprehensive about the subject. Among Eakins scholars, only Theodor Siegl has ventured more than a wondering

appreciation for the manifest complexity of Eakins's preparations. Those readers, like me, who remember high school geometry dimly, will be encouraged to hear from Eakins that the "science of perspective is of great simplicity and of easy comprehension."<sup>3</sup> The explanation of a few terms, often encountered in his text or in the annotations on his drawings, will suffice to introduce the dynamics, if not the mechanics, of this system.<sup>4</sup>

The *picture plane*, often referred to in Eakins's annotations as just the "tableau," is the actual surface of the painting or drawing. In his text and illustrations, Eakins, like many an author of perspective manuals, suggests that the student first imagine this plane as a piece of glass in a window frame. Objects seen through this window might be traced on the glass with a crayon to capture a correct perspective, but—as Eakins notes—if the spectator or the objects move, or if the window is somehow brought closer or pushed farther from the viewer, the tracing will no longer fit the scene and the perspective will no longer seem true. "This shows that a picture once drawn, can be correctly looked at from but one point, where the spectator should have a care to place himself."<sup>5</sup>

This point is established in relation to the picture plane in three ways. First, the point of sight is determined—that is, the spot on the picture plane directly opposite the painter's eye. This point can be anywhere on the canvas or paper; usually it is in the center. For Eakins it is always located somewhere on a vertical line drawn down the middle of the picture. "When a picture is made it is a thousand to one that it is on a flat surface, and intended to hang on a vertical; and a person wishing to see it, will stand opposite the middle of it, and look squarely at it."<sup>6</sup> The vertical axis, or center line, is the first thing drawn on a perspective or a painting; it corresponds to the center of the field of vision that the artist sees and wishes to depict, and therefore it also represents the direction of the line of sight, from artist to picture, as if drawn on the floor and then continued up the picture plane.

The exact location of the point of sight on this vertical line depends on the height of the artist's eye (the horizon), and the distribution of space (or canvas) above or below this viewing position. A landscape seen from a standing position, as in *The Artist and His Father Hunting Reed Birds [on the Cohansey Marshes]*, will have a horizon at about sixty-three inches, the distance from the ground to the eye level of a man (like Eakins) about 5 feet, 9 inches tall.<sup>7</sup> Any object taller, or higher, than sixty-three inches (a tree, a mountain, or the head of a figure standing on the rear deck of a hunting skiff) will project above this horizon, which rarely coincides with the "natural" horizon, where hills, foliage, or architecture meet the sky. Eakins could have

enlarged his canvas to show more sky, or cropped it to include less of the foreground, making the horizon line move in relation to the upper and lower edges of the picture, but the horizon would remain sixty-three inches wherever he placed it on the canvas. For Eakins, choices about framing the image and placing the horizon in the design of the picture surface would come later. At the beginning, students must simply place themselves “so as to see [the objects] as you wish to reproduce them”<sup>8</sup> and translate that eye level, reduced if necessary to a manageable scale, on to the vertical line of the drawing.

Eakins found much richness in this choice, as his perspective drawings show. Only rarely did he use the conventional sixty-inch height recommended by textbooks of the period.<sup>9</sup> His viewpoint ranges from 24 inches, crouched across from a hunter or a rower, to nine feet, observing a sail-boat; although his portraits are usually based on his own seated or standing position, he would often vary his eye level an inch or two to gain a more effective perspective . . . in which particular projects are studied in detail. Overall, the careful calibration of viewing height read in all these subtle variations draws attention to Eakins’s studied approach to his subjects, especially his portrait sitters. Remembering that the horizon line expresses the physical embodiment of the artist, his placement in the world, we can remark that Eakins’s acute sensitivity to his own position in relation to the other human beings he depicts gives emphasis and particularity to his own presence, as artist, just as it adapts to the specific, idiosyncratic nature of others.

The eye level, once determined strategically, is ticked off on the vertical line and then ruled horizontally across the image from edge to edge. The intersection of the vertical axis, or line of sight, and the horizon line marks the exact point of sight. This point, projected out toward the spectator, represents the spot where all the “visual rays” emitted or reflected by the scene converge upon the lens of the eye, forming the “cone of vision.” The same point, projected into the far distance, is the vanishing point, where all parallel lines at right angles to the picture plane will seem to converge. This important point, usually close to the center of the painting, never seems to be exactly in the center of Eakins’s pictures, and usually it is not emphasized; often, as in the portrait of John Hayes Brinton it lies obscurely on the back wall of the room, where, according to Eakins’s advice, such a spot could be flagged for reference.<sup>10</sup> The evasiveness of this point, which rarely coincides with the image of any meaningful object, demonstrates Eakins’s general tendency to obscure the mechanics of his perspective system.

Once the line of sight and the horizon have been drawn, the last variable in the system remains to be determined: the distance between the picture



plane and the eye. "To fix this last distance you consider how large you want your important objects to be in the picture: if you want it life size in the picture, your drawing must be distant from the eye as far as that object. If you wish any object in the picture half as big as real, you must place your picture plane at half the distance from the eye of that object; if quarter as big, quarter the way, & so on."<sup>11</sup> Eakins identified the "law of simple proportion" embedded in this instruction as the "one and only law of perspective, the law which solves all questions of perspective asked simply." In short, objects change size in an orderly, mathematical way, according to an easy ratio: "As the distance of the object from the eye is to the distance of the picture plane from the eye, so is the size of the real object to the size of the picture of this object."<sup>12</sup>

As with the choice of horizon, there is much room to play in this ratio. If, for example, Eakins decided that his figures should be eight inches tall, the ratio of "real object" (say, a sixty-four-inch woman) to image would be 1:8. To maintain this ratio, he might set the distance of the picture at two feet, and place his figures sixteen feet in space. Or the viewing distance could be three feet, in which case the figures would seem to be standing twenty-four feet away. The farther the viewing distance, the more remote the figures—although the image on the picture surface will always be eight inches tall. What changes in this calculation is not the size of the figures but the character of the perspective space around them, and perhaps the quality of color and detail, if a great distance intervenes. The effect of changing positions can be understood by imagining a perspective of space laid out in a checkerboard of one-foot squares, following Eakins's instructions in [*Manual, Drawing 7* (Constructing Space in Perspective) (PAFA)]. From such a grid we can see that the squares in the near foreground change size quickly as they recede; beginning from a baseline at ten feet distant, the squares in a typical grid will shrink by half before they are twenty feet away. Objects moved between these two locations will also diminish at this rate, and anything stretched between these points—such as a rowing shell—will change scale at a startling pace. The upsetting and sometimes comical product of this zone of rapid foreshortening is familiar from "trick" photographs of figures lying on the ground with their feet looming close to the camera. A near viewpoint gives this strong sense of space and—if seen from a standing position—a steep slope to the foreground. Unless such effects are deliberately sought, no painter will be advised to place a large, three-dimensional object closer than about ten feet away; usually the object is set back, and the appearance of immediacy is achieved by cropping the canvas.<sup>13</sup>

A different kind of distortion occurs at greater distances, where the reduction from square to square has slowed as the checkerboard rows come in quick succession. From a standing position, objects seen on a level surface beyond about eighty feet away will hardly change size at all when pressed back an additional ten feet. In a distant object or figure made to seem close to the viewer by cropping the foreground (as if seen through a telescope or a telephoto lens), a kind of compressed foreshortening occurs, where the object recedes abruptly without visible diminution, as in *The Pair-Oared Shell*. This “telescoping” effect can be mitigated by changes in the eye level, as well as by drawing the subject closer to the spectator; as his series of rowing paintings shows, Eakins tested all the variables. Long, awkward objects, like racing shells or four-in-hand coaches, forced Eakins to be ingenious, but the eccentricity and variety of his choices also show pleasure in the manipulation of effects and in the negotiation of different solutions, like variations on a theme or problem in perspective.<sup>14</sup>

The choice of viewing distance also must take into account the size of the intended picture, for obviously the spectator has to stand back to take in a life-size portrait, while a small watercolor will be studied at close range. “There is no mathematical impossibility about making a picture far wider than the eye can see it at one time but a very wide picture so made is very ugly,” wrote Eakins.<sup>15</sup> He did not explain why, but the rare intrusion of aesthetic judgment in his prose signals, with typical bluntness, strong disapproval of the illegibility and unnaturalness of effect brought about by excessive width. An optimum viewing distance will bring the entire composition comfortably within the field of vision, and if the viewer is meant to grasp much detail, the picture should be embraced within a 45-degree angle of sight or less. Outside of this wedge human eyesight loses acuity, and other types of distortion in the perspective field become bothersome.<sup>16</sup> To find the viewing distance that brackets the sharp and undistorted center of the visual cone without standing too close, artists and writers of perspective manuals developed various rules of thumb requiring no geometrical expertise. Some advised that the spectator never be closer than the width of the picture; others suggested using the diagonal of the canvas as a yardstick. “I have seen a rule that a picture should not be wider in its diagonal than the picture is distant from the eye,” wrote Eakins. “I think this would be the very extreme limit of its greatness.”<sup>17</sup> Applying these two tactics, the image will always fall within a 53-degree or a 45-degree angle. A more conservative result could be achieved by following Leonardo’s advice to make the viewing distance at least three times longer than the tallest principal feature in the painting—by which

calculation a life-size standing portrait would merit a viewing distance of sixteen to eighteen feet, a watercolor of five-inch baseball players would be constructed from a viewing distance of fifteen to twenty inches—or within a visual angle of 22 degrees.<sup>18</sup> The viewing distances for Eakins's pictures fall into this range—never less—but never exactly and repetitiously so, as if by formula. Generally they are much longer than the minimum, sometimes because unusual objects like racing shells required deep placement in space, or because he wished for a very confined visual angle, as seen in the *Portrait of Monsignor James P. Turner*.

Armed with this set of definitions and the “one and only law of perspective,” we can examine a representative suite of drawings, including a previously known sketch and two newly discovered perspective drawings for the watercolor *Baseball Players Practicing* of 1875.<sup>19</sup> This group offers a useful introduction to Eakins's method, and a demonstration of what can be learned from close analysis of such drawings. The conceptual and detached character of the perspective drawing process appears very purely in one of the Bregler drawings [*Baseball Players Practicing: Perspective Study* c. 1874–75], which is completely empty of reference to the material world. Fortunately, Eakins inscribed it “Base Ball,” sparing us the work of comparing the spatial coordinates to all the likely paintings of this period. The vertical line and the horizon are sharply drawn and easy to identify; the pattern of diagonal lines gathered at the intersection of these two axes makes the point of sight obvious. These diagonals, representing a system of parallel lines perpendicular to the picture plane (the “orthogonals”), have been crossed by horizontal lines, numbered where they intersect the vertical line, from 40 at the bottom up to 175. It is safe to assume that these numbers indicate feet and that the forty-foot baseline in the foreground is likewise divided from side to side at intervals meant to represent feet; the grid that we see is meant to represent a floor of one-foot squares. This presumption is based on convention, but it is reinforced by the subdivision of the fourth “square” to the left into twelve units, certainly representing inches. Typically, this denser set of lines used as an inch scale is set to one side, where it will not overlap other important business. Using calipers, Eakins could quickly measure the apparent size of any object whose dimensions were known, when seen at any place on this grid.<sup>20</sup>

Another area of denser pattern appears in this drawing between sixty-five and eighty feet distant. Without knowing the subject, one could guess that important figures or objects, requiring more refined measuring lines, were destined for this zone, or along the diagonal that runs at a 45-degree angle across the squares between about fifty and sixty-two feet away. Slight

tick marks visible along the sixty-four-foot line indicate where Eakins measured out the intervals between his orthogonals. The foot-squares here are three-quarters of an inch wide—an easy unit to measure—indicating a scale of one-sixteenth for objects placed along this line. From this ground line up to the horizon, it is four inches; this distance times the scale factor ( $4 \times 16$ ) tells us the height of the horizon: sixty-four inches, confirmed by Eakins's inscription at the upper right. Although no figures can be seen, we can imagine that their eye level will be close to the horizon. Eakins's annotations also give us the viewing distance ("Tableau 4 pieds"), but this distance can also be learned from measuring the drawing at a convenient base line (such as sixty-four) and applying the "one law": as the distance of the object from the eye (sixty-four feet) is to the distance of the picture plane from the eye ( $x$ ), so is the size of the real object to the size of the picture of this object ( $16:1$ ), or  $x/64 = 1/16$ , making the viewing distance four feet. Although the drawing is empty and without suggestion of a border, two things can be deduced without prior knowledge of the finished watercolor: that the figures in the shaded zone of the grid will be about four and three-fourths inches tall and that the painting is not large—no larger than four feet across diagonally, and probably, given Eakins's habit of long viewing distances, considerably smaller. While such information is ridiculously vague and redundant when the finished painting is at hand, it can prove useful, as we shall see, if no other related work survives.

The presence of the actual watercolor helps us understand the meaning of the diagonal on the drawing, for a similar graphite line is visible beneath the pale washes of the dirt base path where Wes Fisler and John Clapp stand. This line, and the slightly greater size of the figures (the batter is five inches tall), suggest that the invisible figures on the perspective drawing may have been planned to be seen near the fifty-six-foot line, where the diagonal crosses the vertical axis. The scale here is an odd one-fourteenth of life, assuming a figure about 5 feet, 10 inches tall in real life. This awkward fraction, set against the tidiness of the image size, suggests that Eakins imagined the five-inch height of his "Athletic boys" first, and then generated the necessary placement in space and their scale, according to the method described in his book.

Looking at the watercolor, it is a surprise to think that the players are fifty-six feet away, and it also seems like four feet is a very long viewing distance for a picture that is only about 9 x 10 inches when matted. A second drawing in the Bregler collection, [*Baseball Players Practicing: Perspective Study with Figures*], helps us understand that Eakins altered the spatial

coordinates of the first perspective before undertaking the final watercolor. This drawing helpfully includes figures, albeit ghostly ones, and the outlines of the grandstand, as well as the same base-path diagonal, but there are no annotations to tell us the horizon, the viewing distance, or the actual distance of anything depicted in this scene. These numbers can all be deduced by measuring the drawing, with the help of information suggested by the earlier perspective. The horizon line is probably close to sixty-four inches again, near Eakins's own eye level and close to the eye of the batter, a first baseman who may have been slightly taller than the artist. Two likely horizon lines appear in the drawing, but from the emphatic, superimposed lines of the grandstand and the level of the railing seen in the watercolor, the lower of the two seems to be the one he used. We can guess that Eakins tested the idea of a higher viewpoint and then dropped it several inches, or else miscalculated the height of the railing and revised it to coincide with the horizon. The height of the batter is again five inches, indicating the same one-fourteenth scale at the spot where he stands. However, these measurements can remain constant while the spatial coordinates shift, so they are of little help in measuring the distance factors. More useful is the base path, which now shows a noticeably steeper slope, more like the one seen in the watercolor. If this diagonal line still cuts across the squares of the grid on a 45-degree angle, as in [*Baseball Players Practicing: Perspective Study*], this steeper slope indicates a closer viewing distance for the picture and a correspondingly closer placement of the ball players. The assumption of this additional continuity from the other perspective drawing is important, for it allows us to engage another handy rule of thumb, also taught by Leonardo and used by Eakins in his text: "The vanishing points for angles of  $45^\circ$ , that is, for lines sloping like the diagonals of a square on the floor, two sides parallel with the picture, would be as far to the right or left of the central plane as the picture is forward of the eye." By this geometrical shortcut, the diagonal base path, if continued out beyond the picture space, will intersect the horizon at a point distant from the point of sight equal to the viewing distance of the picture. The vanishing point of the diagonal in this drawing is twenty-four inches from the point of sight, revealing the viewing distance as two feet.<sup>21</sup>

Given this new viewing distance, half the length of the one in the previous drawing, combined with the old scale ( $1/14$ ), we can calculate the spatial coordinates in the drawing. The law of perspective, now used to find the distance of the figures ( $2/x = 1/14$ ), will tell us that our boys are twenty-eight feet away. By the same method, the man seated against the stadium wall in the watercolor appears to be about a fiftieth of the height of an actual

figure in that pose, so he must be close to one hundred feet away. Moving forward, the lightly drawn line in the foreground of the drawing (also visible in the watercolor), must be twenty-four feet distant, because an easy scale of one foot to one inch (or 1:12) is found here. The lower edge of the watercolor will then fall along a line twenty feet away.

These distances, especially the viewing distance of the picture, make much more sense for a small painting with figures shown in sharp detail. But what did Eakins gain by this revision? For one thing, legibility. By halving the distance between himself and the picture while retaining the size of the figures, he has also halved the distance to the ball players and therefore drawn them forward in his perspective grid. At this closer location, the horizontal lines of the invisible checkerboard beneath their feet come much farther apart than before, making it much easier for the eye to measure the distance between the players on the ground and their relation to each other in space. The recession that occurs between the forward foot of the batter and the rear foot of the catcher—probably less than twenty-four inches of real space—will be compressed into half as much space on paper at fifty-six feet than at twenty-eight, and Clapp will almost seem to stand behind Fisler. The new arrangement also throws the stadium into a suitably blurry middle distance. The earlier drawing shows the wall at one hundred forty-eight feet, too far to allow any detail in the stands. Considering other alternatives, such as a yet shorter viewing distance of eighteen inches (as close as Eakins would ever stand), the players would be at twenty-one feet, but then the stadium would be about seventy-five feet away, perhaps distractingly close. Furthermore, at this closer range the diagonal movement of the base paths would have grown steeper, broader, and more assertive. In the watercolor, Eakins darkened these paths and narrowed the segment in the foreground by about a third with his final layer of ashes, indicating a wish to diminish its presence, even at this distance.

The choice of the viewing distance becomes, then, a calibration of two- and three-dimensional effects that bear directly on the design of the surface and the impact of the subject. From Eakins's choices, we can better understand his intentions and grow conscious of the artistic manipulation of an ostensibly real, observed scene. The main event, of course, is the ball players, and all Eakins's calculations enhance their importance. They are placed in space for maximum legibility of their postures and costumes, recorded with great care and considerable pride. "The moment is just after the batter has taken his bat, before the ball leaves the pitcher's hand," wrote Eakins to his friend Earl Shinn on 30 January, before the watercolor exhibition opened

in New York. "They are portraits of Athletic boys, a Philadelphia club. I conceive that they are pretty well drawn."<sup>22</sup> His remarks remind us that the scene was meant to look like an actual practice, not a staged portrait, although the moment obviously was chosen for convenience in posing as well as its sense of anticipation. Some elements that appear contrived today are in fact documentary: baseball players of this period wore little protective gear, and—although Clapp looks more like a fielder than a catcher—both batting and catching were done from upright positions, as shown. The effect on Shinn, who reviewed the show for *The Nation*, was one of "pure natural force and virility." Shinn found Eakins's handling "a little stiff and labored," but he ranked the baseball players among the best figure paintings in the exhibition: "The selection of themes in itself shows artistic insight, for American sporting-life is the most Olympian, beautiful and genuine side of its civilization from the plastic point of view; the business of the scene, in all three of [Eakins's] pictures, is attended to with the religious fidelity which a Greek sculptor would show in a commemorative athletic statue, and the forms of the youthful ball-players, indeed, exceed most Greek work we know of in their particular aim of expressing alert strength in a moment of tension."<sup>23</sup>

The players are alert, but the tension stays focused in their figures, because a kind of relaxed energy is reflected from the background, represented by the calm spectator seated against the fence and the scattering of people in the stands, all attentive but motionless. *Scribner's Monthly* remarked the "well-devised background" in this picture, and indeed the mood and placement of the stadium is important to the effect.<sup>24</sup> Formally, it functions as a dark closure to the space; expressively, it returns attention to the foreground and establishes the professional arena of the players. Amphitheater spaces figure significantly elsewhere in Eakins's work: *The Gross Clinic*, begun the same year as this watercolor, and *The Agnew Clinic* both use the same device to fill the background with watchers and engage the spectator. Eakins probably learned to construct such spaces from Gérôme's gladiatorial arenas.<sup>25</sup> In his letter to Shinn, Eakins closed by suggesting that they both go see Gérôme's *Pollice Verso*, and in the next year the image of *Hail Caesar!* would appear within his own painting *The Chess Players*. The structural parallels between Eakins's athletes in their park and Gérôme's gladiators in the Circus Maximus make obvious the impact of his teacher's imagination, as well as Eakins's typically modern, American transformation of types.

Looking back to the figure drawing we can learn more about this stadium. Posts and braces holding up the roof of the stadium were clearly indicated in the drawing but eliminated in the watercolor wherever they

interrupted the grandstand. Perhaps they pressed awareness of the stadium too far forward, or blocked our view of the spectators. The drawing also locates precisely the point of sight, occupied in the watercolor by a dark man standing in the runway leading out of the stadium. This man, and a companion on the other side of this aisle, mirror the poses of the two men seen standing in a similar entrance to the amphitheater in *The Gross Clinic*. All of the observers in *The Gross Clinic* are portraits; is this true for *BaseBall [sic] Players Practicing*? In this mood we might see an image of Benjamin Eakins, seated just above Fisler's bat; is it a coincidence that the red and black jacket on the woman seated next to him is exactly like the one worn by Elizabeth Crowell in *Elizabeth Crowell and Her Dog* (early 1870s; San Diego Museum of Art)? Attention returns to the dark man with the moustache just above the vanishing point. Is this Eakins, literally mirroring himself at the point of sight? This kind of visual play is rare in Eakins's work, although he sometimes included himself in a picture and frequently inserted his family and friends. The suggestiveness of these figures, placed just beyond the point of ready recognition, reiterates the balance between too close and too far struck in all of Eakins's perspective negotiations.

Aware of the deliberate placement of this dark figure, the grandstand, and the players, and conscious of other manipulated components, such as the vanished stadium posts and the shrunk base paths, we must confront the artifice that underlies a painting that seeks to project an impression of realism and authenticity. Where are the players standing? At home? At third? Where are we? Does the relationship between the players and the stands seem right? Isn't Fisler standing behind Clapp, rather than in the line of the pitch? Some of these questions might be resolved by knowledge of the actual playing field the Athletics used, but the evidence of Eakins's drawings suggests that the entire spatial arrangement of this picture has been organized according to the needs of Eakins's design, and not in response to some external reality. This picture is not simply a record of appearances. Such a message often emerges from Eakins's drawings, which demonstrate the persuasive force of the mechanics of perspective—ever encouraging the use of conventional angles, simple fractions, and even numbers—interacting with the creative, arbitrary will of the picture maker.

At a more modest level, knowledge of Eakins's terms and habitual practices in perspective drawing can also illuminate the purpose of vaguely identified items, such as a third baseball drawing previously known and described as possibly "an abandoned first sketch for the subsequent watercolor [or] another picture never carried out."<sup>26</sup> The sketch style tells us that



this is from the preliminary phase of compositional planning, although the figure placement is apparently quite secure. The players assume the poses used in the watercolor, but they are seen from the other side of the “plate,” with the diagonal of the base path sloping in the opposite direction. A loosely sketched backdrop hints at a grandstand. The horizon line, according to an annotation, is exactly the same: sixty-four inches. The batter is again about five inches tall. But the spatial coordinates are different: the figures stand between thirty and thirty-two feet distant, and the drawing is annotated “tableau 8 pieds,” “Dessin 2 pieds.” This inscription indicates that we are looking at a quarter-scale drawing (dessin) for a painting (tableau) to be seen from eight feet away—four times farther than the watercolor. From this viewing distance, a standing figure seen at the thirty-two-foot line would be (by the “law” of perspective,  $8/32 = 1/x$ ) one quarter life size, or eighteen inches tall. From the borders suggested by the pencil lines around the composition, we can estimate that Eakins had a picture about 40 x 30 inches in mind. Both the scale of the figures and the size of the entire image indicate that Eakins envisioned a large oil, not a watercolor. “I think I will try to make a baseball picture some day in oil,” Eakins remarked to Shinn in his letter of 1875. “It will admit of fine figure painting.”<sup>27</sup> Certainly this drawing expresses a developed idea for such a painting, set aside after the commencement of *The Gross Clinic* and eventually abandoned along with all of his sporting subjects, after 1876.

The tentative markings that frame the image in *Perspective Study of Baseball Players*, 1874, indicating a vertical composition, tell us that Eakins was midway through his planning process and about to confirm the proportions and dimensions of his picture. Early drawings . . . give no consideration to the edges of the composition, which were determined after the figures had been firmly planted. The border then responds to these internal forms. We rarely have the chance to see these decisions being debated, as in the drawing for *Rail Shooting on the Delaware*. This method expresses the primacy of the figures and the space, the secondary importance of the picture’s edges and its two-dimensional design. The rail-shooting drawing makes us feel the metaphor of the window frame strongly, as if Eakins is simply enlarging or contracting, or moving forward or back, a rectangle that selects for us a felicitous view of the world. Eakins is secure within his illusionistic space, confident about the correctness of his construction of bodies and volumes, for this is all known and measured; he is less interested in the edges, however, and shows less conviction here, perhaps because there is no obvious right or wrong choice, no “law,” only taste. His tentativeness, and a belated moment of fresh decision-making, shows clearly in the watercolor *Baseball Players*

*Practicing*, where two sets of margins are visible. Initially planned as a squarish or horizontal composition, Eakins considered extending the space to the left and then contracted both sides, drawing the right hand margin about one-fourth inch from the elbow of the seated man at the fence and pulling the left margin to within an inch of Fisler's bat, where he signed and dated the picture. Pencil rulings and additional layers of wash along this margin reiterate his choice, and indeed a tighter composition results from this re-matting. Although the framing decision is sometimes seen in Eakins's drawings, it is a task that, as Fried would have it, belongs more properly to the realm of painting—that is, to the sensibility in charge of the picture's two-dimensional surface. Logically, then, this process was transferred into Eakins's oil sketching method, where it became more decisive and subtle. . . .

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- 1 References to this manuscript [for a drawing manual] are to the paginated typescript, prepared by Theodor Siegl in the early 1970s. I am grateful to Darrel Sewell for his permission to cite this source. Early drafts of some sections of this text are in Charles Bregler's Thomas Eakins Collection, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia (hereafter cited as CBTE), as are a few advanced exercises that Eakins [TE] evidently deleted in his second draft; see Siegl, cat. 56, Foster and Leibold, 122–124, and fiche series I 8/C/3–8/E/9. [The manuscript (Philadelphia Museum of Art), along with its related drawings (Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts), was published as *A Drawing Manual by Thomas Eakins*, ed. and intro. by Kathleen A Foster, essay by Amy B. Werbel (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art in association with Yale University Press, 2005).]
  
  - 2 "For Eakins," wrote McHenry, "the mathematical sciences held a charm of security, a charm of dependability, which they have held for many before him and after. He saw . . . that mathematics is the foundation of all beauty, because mathematics is the science of proportion, and therefore even beauty can be somewhat stated in scientific terms" (Margaret McHenry, *Thomas Eakins Who Painted* [Oreland, Penn: privately printed, 1946], 22). John White's remark is from his classic study *The Birth and Rebirth of Pictorial Space* (London: Faber and Faber, 1957; rev. ed., 1967), 275. TE's aphorism was quoted by [Susan Macdowell Eakins] SME in the draft of her letter to Mrs. Lewis R. Dick [n.d., c. 1930] (CBTE, Foster and Leibold, *Writing About Eakins: The Manuscripts in Charles Bregler's Thomas Eakins Collection* [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press for The Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts], 299; see also Bregler I, Charles Bregler, "Thomas Eakins as a Teacher," *The Arts* 17 [March 1931]: 383).
  
  - 3 TE, [Philadelphia Museum of Art] PMA typescript, I.
  
  - 4 McHenry (22–28) asserted that Eakins made an "original" contribution to artists' perspective, although her analysis is more enthusiastic than it is logical, and I have found Eakins's instruction to be more personalized than innovative. A thorough examination of his methods in the context of French and American practice in this period has not been attempted here, although the topic deserves attention. The bibliography on the history of perspective is large and contentious; the number of teaching manuals is enormous, and their contradictory methods and terms can be confusing. No expert on this subject, I have tried to use Eakins's terminology, as he intended it, or terms generally understood by nonexperts, aware that I may annoy specialists accustomed to more precise, technical meanings. I have benefited from Margaret A. Hagen, *Varieties of Realism: Geometries of Representational Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), for its introduction to modern theories of perception and the multiple geometries of perspective; her message of cultural relativity, in examining alternate systems in times and places outside of the

western tradition, is an important one for art historians, and her bibliography is wide-ranging. Also useful is White, *Birth and Rebirth*; M. H. Pirenne, *Optics, Painting and Photography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970); W. M. Ivins, *Art and Geometry: A Study in Space Intuitions* (New York: Dover, 1964); Fred Dubery and John W. Willats, *Perspective and Other Drawing Systems* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1972, 1983); and Michael Kubovy, *The Psychology of Perspective and Renaissance Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

- 5 TE, PMA typescript, 2.
- 6 TE, PMA typescript, 4. The vertical line is offset to the left only in Eakins's high school exercises and in his own drawing book illustrations (e.g., cat. 100). For teaching purposes, this may have been done to keep the axis of measurement clear of the depicted object, as well as to make the exercise more challenging, since a regular object offset to the side will not present a symmetrical image.
- 7 The perspective drawing for this painting, in the collection of Dr. Peter McKinney, is marked with the notation that the horizon is sixty-three. . . .
- 8 TE, PMA typescript, 5.
- 9 A text used by Eakins at Central High School recommends this standard horizon, probably because this height approximates the eye level of a standing person of average height, and because it can be easily reduced in scale calculations. See William Minifie, *A Text Book of Geometrical Drawing for the Use of Schools* . . . , 2nd ed. (Baltimore: William Minifie & Co., 1850), 86–87.
- 10 TE, PMA typescript, 5. See also McHenry, 25.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 TE, PMA typescript, 3.
- 13 . . . A demonstration of the distortion in objects close to the camera can be seen in Hagen, *Varieties of Realism*, 138. Such joking photographs were also taken by Eakins's students; examples remain in the estate of Mary Bregler and in the Art Gallery of Ontario, from the circle of Eakins's student George A. Reid.
- 14 McHenry (23) argued that all the boating subjects were motivated by Eakins's interest in a series of "progressively more difficult perspective problems." In her analysis (25–26) the search for an optimum, undistorted angle of vision dominated Eakins's choice of eye level and spectator distance.
- 15 TE, PMA typescript, 71.
- 16 . . . Human vision remains fairly sharp within a 90-degree angle, but painters are generally advised to work within a 60-degree field, with an angle less than 45 degrees preferred. Citing Wertheim's curve of optical acuity, Ivins notes that "2-1/2° from the point of greatest sharpness of vision there is a 50% decrease in acuity, and at 45° the acuity has fallen to 2-1/2%" (*Art and Geometry*, 924). Dubery and Willats note that perspective distortions enter the edges of a picture when the angle exceeds 25 degrees (*Perspective and Other Drawing Systems*, 84).
- 17 TE, PMA typescript, 71. Minifie suggested that the viewing distance never be less than the width of the picture (*Text Book of Geometrical Drawings*, 87). Charles Davies, author of another treatise used at Central High School, advocated a position based on the diagonal of the canvas: "It may be greater, and this is left to the taste of the artist" (*A Treatise on Shades and Shadows, and Linear Perspective*, 2nd ed. [New York: Wiley and Long, 1835], 157). More recently, John White suggested the "normal comfortable range for viewing" as "not less than twice its width" (*Birth and Rebirth*, 194).

- 18** On Leonardo's advice, see Dubery and Willats, *Perspective and Other Drawing Systems*, 71, 87. Large paintings to be seen by many people at once should be organized with an even longer viewing distance—ten or twenty times the height of the principal objects, advised Leonardo; see Hagen, *Varieties of Realism*, 134. Probably Eakins's clinic paintings use such very long viewing distances.
- 19** Eakins sent this watercolor to the American Watercolor Society's exhibition in late Jan. 1875 as "Ball Players Practising," no. 313, \$300; probably the painting and its preparatory drawings were begun in the summer or fall of 1874. On this watercolor (G 86), Donelson F. Hoopes, *Eakins Watercolors* with foreword by Lloyd Goodrich (New York: Watson-Guptill, 1971), 32; Theodore E. Stebbins, *American Master Drawings and Watercolors* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976), 168; Susan P. Carmalt, "Selection I: American Paintings and Watercolors from the Museum's Collection," *Bulletin of the Rhode Island School of Design* 58(4) (Jan. 1972): 18-22; and *A Handbook of the Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design* (Providence: The Museum, 1985), no. 199, 265, which identifies the batter as the first baseman of the Philadelphia Athletics, Wes Fisler, with the team's catcher, John Clapp. Unlike most of Eakins's watercolors, there are no oil studies preceding this work; the precision in the figures suggests that they once existed.
- 20** In a more developed perspective drawing Eakins often ruled the inch scale in ink, to increase its precision and durability and to differentiate it from other types of lines in the drawing. See the perspective made for the portrait of John H. Brinton. Another type of inch scale appears in some of the perspectives for the rowing subjects. Eakins describes the construction of an inch scale and its precision up to one thousandth of an inch in his manuscript (II, 19-20).
- 21** TE, PMA typescript, 9. The application of this rule allows for the easy location of the horizontal lines on a perspective grid, once the orthogonals have been drawn. Diagonals emanating from this "measuring point," drawn to the foot markings on any baseline, will intersect the orthogonals exactly at the corners of squares on the grid. Once these corner positions have been located, the edges of the squares can be quickly ruled. The principle of the measuring point (or "distance point") is a cornerstone of most perspective manuals since the publication of Alberti's *Della Pittura* in 1436. A useful visualization of the geometric principles involved is offered in Dubery and Willats, *Perspective and Other Drawing Systems*, 57.
- 22** Lloyd Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press for the National Gallery of Art, 1982), I:94. The full letter is published in Gerald M. Ackerman, "Thomas Eakins and His Parisian Masters Gérôme and Bonnat," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 6th series, vol. 73 (1969), 241.
- 23** "Fine Arts: The Water-color Society's Exhibition," *The Nation* 20 (18 Feb. 1875): 120. Eakins exhibited two other sporting subjects in this show: *Race Boats Drifting* (see cat. 233) and *Whistling for Plover* (unlocated). Other responses to *Baseball* are cited in chap. 9, nn. 35, 36. For my grasp of nineteenth-century baseball throughout this discussion I am indebted to the helpful observations of my household expert, Henry Glassie.
- 24** "Culture and Progress: Eighth Exhibition of the Water-Color Society," *Scribner's Monthly* 9 (Apr. 1875): 764.
- 25** Ackerman (1969) first noted Eakins's "mastery of Gérôme's amphitheater perspective, great circles of rooms which swoop behind the spectator to include him as an observer in the bleachers or as a participant on the sands of the arena," imitated in the clinic pictures and *Between Rounds* (245). Wrote Eakins to Shinn, "Gérôme used to get out his *Pollice Verso* to illustrate to me his principles of painting" (242).
- 26** Phyllis D. Rosenzweig, *The Thomas Eakins Collection of the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1977), 56.
- 27** Ackerman 1969, 241.

# Eakins, Race, and Ethnographic Ambivalence

ALAN C. BRADDOCK, 1998

In 1878, Philadelphia realist painter Thomas Eakins (1844–1916) produced a watercolor that he generically entitled *Study of Negroes*. Known since the artist's 1917 memorial exhibition as *Negro Boy Dancing*, the work has been an important focal point of art historical interpretation regarding Eakins's art and issues of race—although this subject itself has received surprisingly little scholarly attention. In 1966 Sidney Kaplan observed the following about *Negro Boy Dancing*: “Eakins, for the first time in American genre, sharply questioned the slavophile iconography of banjo, grin, and jig when he depicted a serious, lyric family drawn together by music—oblivious to the vaudeville public—quickened and entranced by themselves.” He went on to praise the “loving care Eakins gave to his dancing boy” and asserted that the artist's realism was “scrupulous in its justice.”<sup>1</sup>

A quarter century later, in a book focusing on race and representation, Albert Boime discussed *Negro Boy Dancing* in terms borrowed directly from Kaplan. In this work, Boime says, we see that Eakins's “commitment to factual representation encouraged his individualized treatment of the people he portrayed. . . . At the moment they do not perform on the white man's stage, and they form their own triangular enclosure in this rare glimpse of the private side of black life in the nineteenth century.” In a 1994 volume dealing with “critical” perspectives on nineteenth-century art, Francis K. Pohl wrote about *Negro Boy Dancing*: “In this work Eakins takes up the theme of the dancing, banjo-playing African American, yet presents it in a way that differs significantly from earlier works . . . each figure's physical features and clothing are carefully rendered. . . . While the top hat and cane on the chair suggest that this private lesson will lead to a public performance, for the moment the concern is learning a skill, passing on knowledge from one generation to the next.”<sup>2</sup>

Other paintings and scholarly writings could be cited, but these passages sufficiently convey the state of the question regarding Eakins's art and matters of race, in which *Negro Boy Dancing* stands as a central example. According to the consensus, *Negro Boy Dancing* paradigmatically constitutes an unvarnished, “factual” record—a “rare glimpse of . . . black life,” to use

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Alan C. Braddock, “Eakins, Race, and Ethnographic Ambivalence,” *Winterthur Portfolio* 33 (Summer–Autumn 1998): 135–61. Abridged. Reprinted by permission University of Chicago Press. Courtesy of the author.

Boime's words. As such, it is thought to offer a critique of popular racist caricature of the Jim Crow variety as well as more genteel sentimental imagery.<sup>3</sup>

In other words, the consensus takes Eakins's paintings of blacks more or less at face value as windows onto the world. This accepted wisdom of factual representation falls into an interpretive trap, however—one that Roland Barthes identifies as the “reality effect” because of its basic failure to confront the constructed and mediated nature of even photographic or “documentary” realism. For all of its apparent objectivity, such realism exists as a historically contingent mode of vision, one that produces an illusion of “truth” to serve specific interests and desires. The task of interpretation, then, involves not just looking *through* the realist image as if it were a window but also looking *at* it critically as a material artifact—something art historians have failed to accomplish with *Negro Boy Dancing* and other works in which race is an issue. Instead of being attentive to traces of artistic choice and nuances of historical meaning in the grain of these images, art historians essentially have pronounced “that’s the way it was,” foreclosing further inquiry. In such scholarship, Barthes would say, the real has been “brandished as a weapon against meaning.”<sup>4</sup>

That such a fundamental semiotic confusion between sign and referent, between art and the real, should persist in the literature on Eakins's images of blacks seems puzzling given the recent interrogations of his realism on other fronts by such writers as Michael Fried, Bridget Goodbody, and Michael Hatt. For some reason, race has produced an interpretive block in Eakins scholarship that is particularly resistant to the exploration of richer meanings. The social and art historical price paid has been high, for not only has Eakins's creative role almost disappeared from view, but works such as *Negro Boy Dancing* have come to stand virtually as indices of black *self*-representation. The damage is compounded when Eakins's brand of realism becomes equated with vague and historically unspecific notions of sympathy on his part.<sup>5</sup> If Eakins's realistic images of blacks did not participate in either the discourse of sentimentalism or that of Jim Crow, to which historically specific discourse(s) did they belong?

I believe that a closer reading of *Negro Boy Dancing* and other works reveals a more ambivalent Eakins regarding matters of race—not the univocally sympathetic progressive but rather the detached voyeur who often thought about people in terms of “types” and whose approach to racial difference had an ethnographic dimension quite in keeping with the specific historical circumstances of his career. Such an approach should not be surprising considering the world in which Eakins lived. Anthropologist James

Clifford and a host of other scholars mostly outside the discipline of art history have shown that from the middle of the nineteenth century, both in Europe and America, ethnographic discourse (in visual and textual form) became increasingly popular and pervasive, crossing a number of disciplinary boundaries and often carrying with it conflicted notions of race and identity. This far-reaching historical phenomenon has yet to be considered closely in relation to Eakins; the present essay, which is part of a larger project on art and anthropology in late nineteenth-century Philadelphia, attempts to initiate such a discussion. The point I wish to make is not that Eakins became a professional ethnographer—he did not—but rather that he adapted aspects of ethnographic vision to his artistic practice, analogous to the manner in which he used anatomical knowledge borrowed from the field of medicine.<sup>6</sup>

After all, Eakins was often in direct contact with artists, scientists, and amateurs who were involved in one way or another with ethnography—a practice that was far from being formalized in any rigid, disciplinary sense at the time. A few of the pertinent individuals in this regard included his teacher in Paris, Jean-Léon Gérôme, who was famous as an “ethnographic” painter; photographer Eadweard Muybridge, who, before collaborating with Eakins on the *Animal Locomotion* project had made expeditions to Central America and Alaska to document local scenery, customs, and peoples; Philadelphia philanthropists Talcott Williams and Sophia Williams, who embarked on their own photographic expedition to Morocco in 1889, the year Eakins began painting Talcott’s portrait; Stewart Culin, curator of ethnology at the University of Pennsylvania Museum; and Frank Hamilton Cushing, the U.S. government anthropologist famous for having lived nearly four years with the Zuni Indians of the Southwest. In addition to the Williamses, both Culin and Cushing sat for portraits by Eakins. All these individuals were more than passing acquaintances of his.<sup>7</sup>

An important task of this essay will be to explore a few of the points of intersection among Eakins, his art, and the burgeoning discourse of ethnography. For the sake of brevity, I concentrate roughly on the two decades between 1866, when Eakins went to Paris and began studying with Gérôme, and 1886, when he was forced to step down as director of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. The late 1880s serve as an appropriate end-limit for the present study because of two important and related events in the institutionalization of anthropology in Philadelphia: the founding (1886) of the University of Pennsylvania’s graduate program in the field and the founding (1889) of the university’s museum, which became an important site of ethno-

graphic collections, research, and display under Culin and his mentor, Daniel Garrison Brinton (the subject of another portrait by Eakins).<sup>8</sup>

A closer look at Eakins's work of the late 1860s into the 1880s reveals a distinct prescientific ethnographic interest in race, ethnicity, and other categories of human difference. Images such as *Negro Boy Dancing* manifest some of the very ambivalences and contradictions that marked early ethnographic and anthropological practice. Ostensibly empirical yet ultimately fraught with evolutionary assumptions, the nascent "study of man" tended to present a progressive face while upholding notions of racial hierarchy. As historian John Haller has observed in *Outcasts from Evolution*, this was a period in which "racial theories, both 'liberal' and 'conservative,' tended to perpetuate an enduring image masked with assorted variations on the single theme of permanent racial inferiority."<sup>9</sup> Haller's assessment suggests that racial science at that time, especially in the fledgling field of anthropology, was marked by a kind of structural ambivalence—an internal conflict between the desire for objective means and subjective ends.

A similar point has been made by Clifford in his discussion of ethnographic self-fashioning, an ambivalent response to racial Others visible at the turn of the century even in the work of progressive ethnographers such as Bronislaw Malinowski. Citing evidence from the latter's personal field diary, Clifford shows that Malinowski's practice of participant-observation cannot be considered (as it once was) an unproblematic sign of sympathetic engagement with the human subjects he studied. It did, however, signal a growing uncertainty and decenteredness in Western vision regarding Caucasian primacy in the world. Clifford highlights similarities between Malinowski and contemporary writer Joseph Conrad. Although from different disciplines, the works of both men demonstrate what Clifford calls a new "ethnographic subjectivity," characterized by "the condition of off-centeredness in a world of distinct meaning systems, a state of being in a culture while looking at culture."<sup>10</sup>

With respect to the subtle workings of racial stereotype, this sense of Western ambivalence and decenteredness has been theorized in a different register by postcolonial critic Homi Bhabha. According to Bhabha, colonialist stereotype elicits and evokes, in a repetitive way, the very thing it seeks to contain—racial difference—just as it employs techniques geared toward containment. As Bhabha says, "The stereotype . . . is a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always 'in place,' already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated . . . as if the essential duplicity of the Asiatic or the bestial sexual license of the African that needs no



proof, can never really, in discourse, be proved.” Moreover, the stereotype thus relates to Sigmund Freud’s concept of the fetish, for both reveal an ambivalent combination of fear and pleasure, desire and disavowal that are subject to repetition:

This process is best understood in terms of the articulation of multiple belief that Freud proposes in his essay on fetishism. It is a non-repressive form of knowledge that allows for the possibility of simultaneously embracing two contradictory beliefs . . . It is through this notion of splitting and multiple belief that, I believe, it becomes easier to see the bind of knowledge and fantasy, power and pleasure, that informs the particular regime of visibility deployed in colonial discourse. The visibility of the racial/colonial Other is at once a point of identity (‘Look a Negro’) and at the same time a problem for the attempted closure within discourse. . . . The stereotype is in that sense an impossible object.<sup>11</sup>

Bhabha’s analysis suggests further that the stereotype accrues power as it becomes more, not less, ambivalent and complex about the way it represents the racial Other. That is, the stereotype might be said to function more effectively or insidiously when it is harder to pin down, when it seems to ennoble and dignify at the same time that it maintains hierarchy. From this point of view, a grotesque caricature of Jim Crow could be considered less powerful as a stereotype (because it is easily dismissed as unscientific) than one couched in the empirical rhetoric of realism. Whereas the one wears its heart on its sleeve, the other becomes naturalized within a discourse of scientific observation.

Eakins’s reputation for quasi-scientific objectivity and progressive sympathy, as well as his recurring practice of self-representation in the role of participant-observer (itself a nascent ethnographic technique), merit rethinking according to the critical terms used by Haller, Clifford, and Bhabha. On the one hand, Eakins’s ethnographic gaze might be seen as exerting a scrutinizing power and control over those he viewed, placing him in the privileged position of omniscient voyeur. Yet, by representing himself often as a participant-observer, Eakins created a certain ambiguity about subject-object positions and structures of hierarchy. That is, by entering the field of vision and inquiry—in a sense, temporarily becoming an Other—Eakins also com-

promised his privileged position somewhat.<sup>12</sup> An example of this occurs in *The Artist and His Father Hunting Reed-Birds in the Cohansey Marshes*, a work that permitted Eakins (as the poleman) to identify with an anonymous and racially heterogeneous class of laboring Others while distancing himself (as a bourgeois artist) from them. The painting thus reveals a double logic: it simultaneously upholds and breaks down hierarchical distinctions between races and classes of people. Structured by the ambivalent conditions of ethnographic vision, this and other works by Eakins are richly contradictory and multivalent, precluding any conveniently definitive interpretation of Eakins's attitude toward the Other.

Between 1866 and 1870, Eakins studied in Paris under Jean-Léon Gérôme, Léon Bonnat, and Augustin-Alexandre Dumont. The key figure for this discussion, however, is Gérôme, an internationally famous academic realist and orientalist whose repeated expeditions to North Africa and Asia Minor led contemporary Parisian and American critics to praise his "ethnographic veracity" and "scientific" approach to painting. In 1857 prominent French critic Théophile Gautier even had this to say about the figures in Gérôme's orientalist images: "M. [Marcel de] Serres, the anthropologist, would be able to consult with absolute certainty these specimens of unrecorded races. . . . M. Gérôme satisfies one of the most demanding instincts of the age: the desire which people have to know more about each other."<sup>13</sup>

Eakins's own letters from Paris during the late 1860s indicate that he also admired Gérôme's artistic method and its results. . . . In [a] letter, addressed to his mother in 1869, Eakins mentions: "Who that has read the Arabian nights or the Bible or any traveller's stories but wants to see the east. Gérôme can help you see it if you cant go there. . . . How often has Gérôme painted those simple Eastern prayers. . . . They are men of deep feeling these men of the East but they are lazy & sensual." Eakins even considered going "there" himself (to Algiers specifically), but eventually he opted for Spain.<sup>14</sup>

The proximity of literary and empirical concerns expressed in the letter to his mother reveals the imbrication of fiction and ethnography at the time, both in Eakins's mind and more generally within the culture he inhabited. Although that culture placed a premium on empiricism, art nevertheless could serve as a surrogate for direct observation. Hence we have Eakins's willingness to believe—without seeing for himself—that Arabs were "men of deep feeling" as well as "lazy & sensual," demonstrating not only the persuasiveness of Gérôme's ethnographic realism but also Eakins's acceptance of certain enduring stereotypes. As Edward Said has shown, these particular stereotypes were endemic to orientalist discourse and formed part of what he

calls “a system of knowledge” that had worked powerfully in behalf of Western colonialism, especially since the time of Napoleon I.<sup>15</sup> By simultaneously praising Arabs for their deep feeling and deprecating them for being lazy and sensual, Eakins also demonstrates just the sort of ambivalence that Bhabha has identified as intrinsic to the stereotype.

This ambivalent approach to racial and ethnic Others emerges powerfully in additional letters written by Eakins in Europe. The pertinent passages lack explicit references to art, so they are not often quoted by art historians. Yet they provide concrete evidence of Eakins’s conscious typing and nascent ethnographic sense of human difference at an early point in his career. Cultural historian Ellen Strain has discussed tourism, traveling circuses, and other exotic spectacles as important sites of Western popular fascination with, and consumption of, ethnographic difference in the nineteenth century. More than a hint of this fascination emerges in Eakins’s letters. For example, writing from Paris in 1869, he mentions having attended a Japanese circus: “The Japanese are as far ahead of the others as well can be. They do their things with such perfect ease. I except the American horseback rider for no one could be finer I think & we don’t know about how the Japanese could ride. They seem much stronger than the white people and yet the muscles of their bodies don’t cut at all out from one another even in things requiring great strain.” But Eakins did not need the circus to make these kinds of observations. In a previous letter from Paris, to his sister Fanny, he had written: “So we got supper and had plenty of fun singing and playing tricks on each other and the stupid country people for in France country men are not like ours at home but more like Pennsylvania Dutchmen.” . . .

Passages such as these abound in Eakins’s letters from Europe, revealing a penchant for viewing people as representative of racial and/or regional types rather than as specific individuals. Given Eakins’s historical moment, his attitude is not surprising, since many people of his time expressed similar notions.<sup>16</sup> Such typing, however, seems difficult to reconcile with Eakins’s well-established reputation for capturing the individuality and personal character of the people he painted. Although it might be tempting to dismiss these youthful letters as aberrant and irrelevant to his art, evidence of typing appears in Eakins’s paintings as well.

. . .

While *Negro Boy Dancing* displaced orientalist ethnography by essentially casting blacks as America’s gypsies, in a closely related move Eakins seems to have capitalized on the Otherness of his American scenes from the perspective of a French audience. During the 1870s he sent a number of

works to Gérôme in Paris for exhibition at the Salon and for sale through dealer Albert Goupil, including *Pushing for Rail*, a (now lost) oil version of *Whistling for Plover*, and a watercolor of *John Biglin in a Single Scull* (1873–74), although not *Negro Boy Dancing*.<sup>17</sup> Whereas such scenes of so-called modern life in America have always been viewed from a domestic, national standpoint, to French eyes they would have been perceived as exotic—a kind of occidental orientalism.

This sense of the exotic would explain why William Sartain was able to write from Paris that Eakins's pictures attracted "a good deal of attention" at the Salon of 1875, where *Pushing for Rail* was entitled simply *A Hunt in the United States*. The use of such a generic title further suggests that it embodied a type valued for qualities that were peculiarly American—or at least peculiarly foreign—to the French. Indeed, as one Parisian critic writing about the Salon noted: "There is a whole mass of names from the United States in the catalogue. They are still only students, but full of promise. Among those having already fulfilled their promise [is] Mr. Thomas Eakins, a disciple of Mr. Gérôme, who has sent from Philadelphia a mighty strange painting [*un bien étranger tableau*], but which is far from having no good points. *A Hunt in the United States* is a work of genuine precision; it is rendered in a way that is photographic. There is a veracity of movement and details which is truly great and singular. This exotic product [*Ce produit exotique*] teaches you something, and its author is not one to be lost sight of." The author's acknowledgement of the exoticism, realism, and instructive value of Eakins's work echoes earlier assessments of Gérôme, such as Gautier's praise of the latter's ethnographic "veracity" as a boon to anthropologists. Although the critic in *L'Art* did not specifically use the term *ethnographic* to describe Eakins, he evidently felt that this American upheld Gérôme's standards by presenting French Salon visitors with convincing images of an unfamiliar, exotic culture.<sup>18</sup>

The specific locale depicted by Eakins in his hunting pictures even carried connotations of Otherness in the minds of urban, middle-class Americans, for whom it apparently constituted a rustic foil to city life. Known as Back Neck, or simply The Neck, this marshy area near Fairton, New Jersey, was featured in an 1881 *Scribner's Monthly* article entitled "A Day in the Ma'sh." The article emphasizes The Neck's quaint, picturesque character, noting that the area was "celebrated for its cabbages, its pigs, its dogs, its dikes, its reed-birds, its inhabitants, and, above all, for its smells"—a taxonomy intended to amuse the reader by evoking a stereotype of rural backwardness and lack of refinement. Although apparently not often fre-

quoted by “fashionable Philadelphians,” The Neck nevertheless appealed to a heartier, middle-class pleasure-seeker from the city, whom the author refers to as the “native Philadelphian.” Since Eakins and his family owned a vacation house there, he evidently was one of the “natives.”<sup>19</sup>

Two of the twelve illustrations for the *Scribner's* article were based on paintings by Eakins. One, entitled *Rail-Shooting*, reproduces Eakins's *Will Schuster and Blackman Going Shooting* [*Rail Shooting on the Delaware*] while the other, *A Pusher*, reproduces a study of the black poleman from the left side of *Pushing for Rail*. Meanwhile, the text makes no mention of black inhabitants of the area and only notes that “many foreigners inhabit the Neck—principally Irish.”<sup>20</sup> Evidently the author did not consider The Neck to be a domicile for such people, so he designated them foreigners rather than Americans. A question then arises as to the foreign or exotic connotations of African Americans in this context. Did images of blacks performing auxiliary labor (no white polemen are illustrated) serve to accentuate the rustic charm and alluring cultural Otherness of The Neck for urban, middle-class readers of the *Scribner's* piece? Whether Eakins consciously thought so is difficult to tell, but the editors of the magazine deemed his images appropriate for this kind of popular tourist ethnography, which Eakins and his family also embraced as active participants.

Eakins's hunting pictures of the 1870s invite other interesting readings that vary the ethnographic theme under discussion. His 1874 watercolor *Whistling for Plover* presents a black man armed with a shotgun pointed in the viewer's general direction—not an insignificant gesture this soon after the Civil War, especially in light of Hatt's thesis about gender, the legacy of black involvement in the military, and America's continuing concerns about racial hierarchy. Indeed, the gun might be said to masculinize this black hunter, whose skill is evident from the numerous fallen birds around him and his visible determination to lure more prey with his whistle. He clearly possesses the necessary mental concentration and physical ability to flush out and kill his quarry.<sup>21</sup>

Accompanying this affirmative reading, however, are darker, more negative elements, not least of which is the fact that we, as beholders, seem to occupy a position vis-à-vis the hunter not entirely dissimilar from the quarry itself. With this in mind, a closer look at the painting reveals an unsettling resemblance between the dead birds scattered in the foreground and the figure of a human being (presumably another hunter) lying supine in the background, just left of center. Although Eakins did not consciously intend this black man to appear as if he were in the process of committing multiple

homicide, the image carries strong visual suggestions—both conscious and unconscious—of the hunter's potent and threatening ability to kill. Moreover, these energies, heightened by the dramatic perspective, are directed very much toward the viewer in a confrontational, yet visually fascinating way that renders the black hunter both fearsome and impressive. As such, *Whistling for Plover* evokes and recasts a certain subgenre within orientalism of armed and threatening Others: Arab chieftains, Moorish executioners, harem guards, and the like—images of which Eakins would have known in Paris.<sup>22</sup>

As if to partially undercut this threatening aspect, Eakins introduced elements that also subvert the alluring potency of the black hunter. For example, forced to kneel on the ground, the hunter assumes a visually subordinate position with respect to the beholder, not unlike the freed slave before Lincoln in Ball's *Emancipation Group*. Moreover, the portions of his legs below the knees have been so thoroughly hidden by foreshortening as to make them almost seem amputated. In 1876 Eakins gave *Whistling for Plover* to his friend S. Weir Mitchell, the prominent writer and neurologist who was well known at the time for his research on Civil War amputees and the phenomenon of "ghost limbs." Unconsciously, perhaps, the image focused and channeled a number of powerful, period-specific energies and anxieties—about racial difference, dismemberment, and death—to which Eakins and Mitchell were particularly sensitive.<sup>23</sup>

Significantly, Eakins had produced two earlier versions of the same plover-hunting theme: a finished oil painting that Gérôme helped him sell in Paris (now lost), and a very small oil sketch depicting the kneeling hunter as white. *Whistling for Plover*, therefore, represents a later, more elaborate statement of the theme, for which Eakins apparently considered a crouching, earthbound *black* man preferable. This choice would seem to reiterate, in a displaced form, his earlier associations of baseness and materiality with Spanish parishioners at prayer. Although a black hunter is obviously not the same as a Spanish supplicant, to Eakins both were ethnographic Others in contact with the ground.<sup>24</sup> *Whistling for Plover* even reprises Eakins's earlier concerns about the power of music, which here have become amplified just as the sound itself has diminished—from a Spanish cathedral's cacophonous pipe organ to a hunter's solitary whistle that serves as a harbinger of death. As in *Negro Boy Dancing*, the music of the black body is unwritten.

Eakins's other important hunting images, such as *Pushing for Rail*, *The Artist and His Father Hunting Reed-Birds*, and *Will Schuster and Blackman Going Shooting*, all depict white hunters standing erect in boats steered and propelled by polemen. For my purposes, a more salient point is the fact that

these works represent an activity that Eakins knew well from personal observation and participation, as suggested by his self-representation in *The Artist and His Father Hunting Reed-Birds*.<sup>25</sup> As mentioned, the Eakins family had a small vacation house near Fairton, New Jersey, where the artist and his father periodically hunted rail and other reed birds.

In one of the few attempts to interpret Eakins's hunting images critically regarding the issue of race, Brian Allen has said of *Will Schuster and Blackman Going Shooting* that "there is no question of actual equality" between the white hunter and black poleman, for "one is white, affluent, and sportily urban" while "the other is black and countrified, a hired hand." As Allen's brief analysis concludes, "Eakins's consignment of blacks to a status such as this, only a decade after the Civil War's end, reveals the country's desire for a speedy return to 'normality,' leaving economic and social integration even of northern blacks largely unachieved." Allen's point about racial hierarchy and the "return to 'normality'" supports some of the observations made above regarding a sense of nostalgia in Eakins's nearly contemporaneous *Negro Boy Dancing*. When all the hunting pictures are considered together, though, the issue of hierarchy gets muddled by the fact that Eakins inserted himself into the role of poleman in *The Artist and His Father Shooting Reed-Birds*. Eakins's self-representation here as a participant-observer suggests an understanding of, and even identification with, the anonymous polemen laborers—white and black—that he depicted elsewhere. Textual corroboration of his knowledge of their skills occurs in an explanatory letter he sent to Gérôme in 1874 along with some hunting pictures to be shown in Paris.

. . . Eakins was well informed about the procedures, both from the hunter's and the pusher's point of view. Also interesting is Eakins's sense of the dual nature of the poleman's position and status: this laborer at once occupies an "elevated" plane of visibility—and hence looks down on the hunter—while also performing the doglike task of fetching dead birds. Indeed, Eakins's comment that "good pushers distinguish themselves" with their powers of recall "after just one turn of the head" could almost as easily describe a well-trained bloodhound as a human being.<sup>26</sup>

A certain duality also emerges from a small but important detail of *The Artist and His Father Hunting Reed-Birds*—the Latin inscription on the bow of the boat: "BENJAMINI EAKINS FILIUS PINXIT" [painted by the son of Benjamin Eakins].<sup>27</sup> As is so often the case in Eakins's art, writing, here in the form of an inscription, serves as a badge of distinction and differentiation: it announces his double identity as protagonist in, and maker of, the picture. The self-referential inscription in Latin marked Eakins as highly literate and

preserved his outsider status at the very moment that he demonstrated an insider's knowledge of the poleman's manual craft. This participant-observer position permitted Eakins to claim mastery of a form of labor ultimately alien to him as a bourgeois professional. He became a laborer, but only temporarily.

Eakins's Latin inscription, which identifies him as the painter, actually does so only *implicitly*—referring to him indirectly as the “son of Benjamin Eakins.” Though seemingly a minor detail, the point exemplifies and underscores the subtle semantic ambivalence coursing through Eakins's works. By indicating but not naming himself, Eakins preserved a modicum of anonymity, leaving open the possibility of viewing the artist as just another poleman, like the black figure in *Will Schuster*. Consequently, while Allen's reading gets closer to the heart of the matter than much previous scholarship on Eakins's hunting pictures, his assessment is too binary and unidirectional about the sense of racial hierarchy that the images construct. Instead, Eakins's self-representation as poleman/participant-observer produces a crucial and powerful sense of ambivalence that results in something like Bhabha's “impossible object.” In contrast to what Allen says, then, there is some question about equality in these pictures because they utterly confound issues of race, class, and identity.<sup>28</sup> Eakins poses the question only to leave it unanswered.

...

Throughout the first two decades of Eakins's career, then, he adapted modes of vision and painting that can be considered ethnographic in a pre-scientific sense. Whether depicting Spanish gypsies, African American minstrels in training, rural laborers, or muscular athletes, Eakins's images were inflected by a period-specific ethnographic interest in Otherness, construed variously in terms of race, ethnicity, and/or social class. As part of the historical baggage carried by these images, they disclose a noticeable ambivalence on Eakins's part toward the “types” of persons he observed, wrote about, and depicted. Recognizing this ambivalence is essential to understanding his work historically, for it forces us to avoid embracing Eakins as wholly progressive and sympathetic—a man out of his time. On the other hand, it certainly prevents us from glibly dismissing him as an unremitting racist or xenophobe; to do so would be just as reductive and ahistorical. Eakins's art belongs to the late nineteenth century, and it took part in one of the most pervasive discourses of the period.



- 1 On the various early titles given to *Negro Boy Dancing*, see Elizabeth Milroy, *Guide to the Thomas Eakins Research Collection with a Lifetime Exhibition Record and Bibliography*, ed. Douglas Paschall (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1996), 20. *Study of Negroes* is the title under which the painting was first exhibited, at the American Water Color Society Eleventh Annual Exhibition (early February–March 3, 1878), New York. Other titles given to the work during Eakins's lifetime were *The Negroes* and *The Dancing Lesson*. The Eakins memorial exhibition of 1917 was held at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Sidney Kaplan, "The Negro in the Art of Homer and Eakins," *Massachusetts Review* 7, no. 1 (Winter 1966): 114.
- 2 Albert Boime, *The Art of Exclusion: Representing Blacks in the Nineteenth Century* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1990), 102. Francis K. Pohl, "Black and White in America," in Stephen F. Eisenman, ed., *Nineteenth-Century Art: A Critical History* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1994), 185.
- 3 Boime, *Art of Exclusion*, 102. Pohl, "Black and White," 185, cites Eastman Johnson's *Old Kentucky Home* of 1859 as an example of genteel sentimental imagery. A new study on Eakins, Kathleen Foster, *Thomas Eakins Rediscovered* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), became available only during the final stage of preparing the present article for publication. Foster differs somewhat from the consensus I have described in that she perceives elements of comedy and picturesque nostalgia in *Negro Boy Dancing*. Nevertheless, she concludes (in another echo of Kaplan) that Eakins and Winslow Homer "show a respectful sensitivity to ethnographic detail and a resistance to stereotype unusual at this period" (Foster, *Thomas Eakins*, 91). The present article seeks to question such notions of sensitivity by exploring the richly ambivalent and mediated nature of ethnographic detail in Eakins's realism.
- 4 Roland Barthes, *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986), 141–48. Barthes offers a critique of realism in several of his other writings, such as *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981); and *S/Z: An Essay*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Noonday, 1974).
- 5 Michael Fried, *Realism, Writing, Disfiguration: On Thomas Eakins and Stephen Crane* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 1–89; Bridget L. Goodbody, "The Present Opprobrium of Surgery: The Agnew Clinic and Nineteenth-Century Representations of Cancerous Female Breasts," *American Art* 8, no. 1 (Winter 1994): 33–51; Michael Hatt, "Muscles, Morals, Mind: The Male Body in Thomas Eakins' *Salutat*," in Kathleen Adler and Marcia Pouton, eds., *The Body Imaged: The Human Form and Visual Culture since the Renaissance* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 57–69; and Michael Hatt, "The Male Body in Another Frame: Thomas Eakins' *The Swimming Hole* as a Homoerotic Image," *Journal of Philosophy and the Visual Arts* (1993): 9–21. By referring to black self-representation, I do not mean to suggest that there has ever existed an essential, undifferentiated blackness that could be represented (by Eakins or anyone else). I consider racial identity to be a heterogeneous and historically changing cultural construct. Indeed, the problematic nature of race as a category has become widely recognized among scholars in the sciences and humanities, many of whom view it as a floating signifier; see Kwame Anthony Appiah, "Race," in Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin, eds., *Critical Terms for Literary Study* (2d ed., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 274–87; Henry Louis Gates, ed., *Race, Writing, and Difference* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986); and Walter Benn Michaels, "Race into Culture: A Critical Genealogy of Cultural Identity," *Critical Inquiry* 18, no. 4 (Summer 1992): 655–85. On notions of sympathy, see Lloyd Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins*, 2 vols. (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1982), 1:108.
- 6 James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988); Curtis M. Hinsley, "Zunis and Brahmins: Cultural Ambivalence in the Gilded Age," in George W. Stocking, Jr., ed., *Romantic Motives: Essays on Anthropological Sensibility* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 169–207; Elizabeth

- Edwards, "Photographic Types: The Pursuit of Method," *Visual Anthropology* 3, nos. 2-3 (July 1990): 235-58; Roslyn Poignant, "Surveying the Field of View: The Making of the RAI Photographic Collection," in Elizabeth Edwards, ed., *Anthropology and Photography* (New Haven: Yale University Press in association with the Royal Anthropological Institute, 1992), 42-73; Brian Street, "British Popular Anthropology: Exhibiting and Photographing the Other," in Edwards, *Anthropology and Photography*, 122-31; Ellen Strain, "Exotic Bodies, Distant Landscapes: Touristic Viewing and Popularized Anthropology in the Nineteenth Century," *Wide Angle* 12, no. 2 (April 1996): 70-100. On Eakins and the Philadelphia medical community, see Elizabeth Johns, *Thomas Eakins: The Heroism of Modern Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 46-81.
- 7 On the wide dissemination of ethnography as a popular science, see esp. Strain, "Exotic Bodies"; I thank Cherise Smith at Stanford University for alerting me to this article. On Eakins and Gérôme, see Gerald M. Ackerman, "Thomas Eakins and His Parisian Masters Gérôme and Bonnat," *Gazette des Beaux Arts*, 6th ser., 73 (April 1969): 235-56; and William I. Homer, *Thomas Eakins: His Life and Art* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1992). On Muybridge, see Homer, *Thomas Eakins*, 147-70; E. Bradford Burns, *Eadweard Muybridge in Guatemala, 1875: The Photographer as Social Recorder* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996); and Richard A. Pierce, "Eadweard Muybridge, Alaska's First Photographer," *Alaska Journal* 7, no. 4 (Autumn 1977): 202-10. Eadweard Muybridge, *Animal Locomotion* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1887). Eakins's contacts with the Williamses as well as their mutual friendship with Walt Whitman is discussed in Carolyn Kinder Carr, "A Friendship and a Photograph: Sophia Williams, Talcott Williams, and Walt Whitman," *American Art Journal* 21, no. 1 (1989): 3-12. On Eakins's friendship with Culin, see Diana Fare, *Objects of Myth and Memory: American Indian Art at the Brooklyn Museum* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Brooklyn Museum in association with the University of Washington Press, 1991), 15. On Eakins's acquaintance with and portrait of Cushing, see William H. Truettner, "Dressing the Part: Thomas Eakins's Portrait of Frank Hamilton Cushing," *American Art Journal* 17, no. 2 (Spring 1985): 48-72.
  - 8 Brinton, the nephew of Dr. John Brinton (another Eakins sitter), was a prominent ethnologist who helped found the University of Pennsylvania's anthropology program; see Regna Darnell, "The Emergence of Academic Anthropology at the University Pennsylvania," *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 6, no. 1 (January 1970): 80-92; Regna Darnell, "Daniel Brinton and the Professionalization of American Anthropology," *Proceedings of the American Ethnological Society* (1976): 69-98; Regna Darnell, *Daniel Garrison Brinton: The "Fearless Critic" of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988). On Eakins's 1899 portrait of Brinton, see Anna Wells Rutledge and Charles Coleman Sellers, eds., *A Catalogue of Portraits and Other Works of Art in the Possession of the American Philosophical Society* (Philadelphia: By the society, 1961), 11-12 and fig. 47; Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins*, 2:166.
  - 9 John S. Haller, Jr., *Outcasts from Evolution: Scientific Attitudes of Racial Inferiority, 1859-1900* (2d ed., Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1995), xii.
  - 10 Clifford, *Predicament of Culture*, 92-113, 93.
  - 11 Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 66-84.
  - 12 On a related visual dynamic, Michel Foucault has discussed how even the surveyor becomes trapped within the regime of panopticism; Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 195-228.
  - 13 On Gérôme's alleged ethnographic veracity, see Théophile Gautier, "Salon de 1857 IV," *L'Artiste* (July 5, 1857): 246, as cited by Mary Anne Stevens, ed., *The Orientalists: Delacroix to Matisse, European Painters in North Africa and the Near East* (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 1984), 143. For a critical interpretation of Gérôme's orientalism, see Linda Nochlin, "The Imaginary Orient," *Art in America* 71, no. 5 (May 1983): 119-31, 186-89; see also Reina Lewis, *Gendering Orientalism*:

*Race, Femininity, and Representation* (London: Routledge, 1996). The standard monograph on Gérôme is Gerald Ackerman, *Jean-Léon Gérôme* (New York: Sotheby's Publications, 1986). Gérôme's *Egyptian Recruits Crossing the Desert* (1857) was exhibited at the Pennsylvania Academy from 1860 to 1862; see Ackerman, "Thomas Eakins and His Parisian Masters," 237. On Gérôme as scientific in his approach, see J. F. B., "Gérôme, the Painter," *The California Art Gallery* 1-4 (1873): 51-52, as cited in Nochlin, "Imaginary Orient," 122. Gautier is cited in Stevens, *Orientalists*, 143.

- 14 Thomas Eakins to Caroline Cowperthwait Eakins, April 1, 1869 (microfilm, Archives of American Art, reel 640, frames 1480-87). For the letter to his father, dated September 14, 1869, in which Eakins ponders going to Algiers, see Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins*, 1:52. Eakins's friend William Sartain did go to Algiers and produced his own orientalist paintings. Sartain's *Nubian Sheik* (1875, National Collection, Paris) is reproduced in David Sellin, *The First Pose* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1976), 17.
- 15 On Eakins and nineteenth-century positivism and empiricism, see Homer, *Thomas Eakins*, 36-37, 131, 159, 219; Linda Nochlin, *Realism* (New York: Penguin Books, 1971), chap. 1, 192-93, 268. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), 6, chaps. 1, 2. Said argues that Napoleon I was a crucial figure in the development of this system, noting that the emperor had made archaeology and anthropology central to his imperial enterprise in North Africa.
- 16 For a general discussion of "typing" in American culture and art, see Elizabeth Johns, *American Genre Painting: The Politics of Everyday Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), xii-xiii, xv-xvi, and 11-12. On ethnographic types, see Edwards, "Photographic Types," 235-56.
- 17 Gordon Hendricks, *Life and Work of Thomas Eakins* (New York: Grossman, 1974), 80-82; Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins*, 1:113-19. For a reproduction of *John Biglin in a Single Scull*, see Homer, *Thomas Eakins*, 66, fig. 55.
- 18 William Sartain to Thomas Eakins, February 1, 1874, as cited in Hendricks, *Life and Work of Thomas Eakins*, p. 81. On the Parisian critic, see *L'Art* 2 (1875): 276, as cited in Hendricks, *Life and Work of Thomas Eakins*, 81, 297. Gautier is quoted in Stevens, *Orientalists*, 43.
- 19 Maurice J. Egan, "A Day in the Ma'sh," *Scribner's Monthly* 22, no. 3 (July 1881): 343-52. Homer, *Thomas Eakins*, 51, 68.
- 20 For a reproduction and discussion of *A Pusher*, see Franklin Kelly, "The Poleman in the Ma'sh," in John Wilmerding, ed., *Thomas Eakins (1844-1916) and the Heart of American Life* (London: National Portrait Gallery, 1993), 100-101, 346. I believe Eakins's attitude toward, and representation of, this black poleman was more ambivalent than Kelly claims. *Will Schuster and Blackman Going Shooting* (1876, Yale University Art Gallery) is reproduced in Wilmerding, *Thomas Eakins*, 88. Foster, *Thomas Eakins*, 366-67, notes that one of Eakins's preparatory drawings for this painting reveals the name of the poleman to be Dave Wright, hitherto known as Blackman.
- 21 Donelson Hoopes, *Eakins Watercolors* (New York: Watson-Guption, 1971), 26.
- 22 Examples include Henri Regnault's *Execution without Judgment under the Caliphs of Granada* (1870, Musée du Louvre), illustrated in Nochlin, "Imaginary Orient," 130; and Gérôme's *An Arab Chief before His Tent* (n.d., Philadelphia Museum of Art), reproduced in Ackerman, "Thomas Eakins and His Parisian Masters," 248.
- 23 In *Realism, Writing, Disfiguration*, 55-56, Fried briefly mentions *Whistling for Plover* in his discussion of foreshortening and the effects of disfiguration in Eakins's *Gross Clinic*, but he does not note the "amputated" appearance of the hunter or explore the implications in terms of race. In light of Mitchell's concerns about enervation and the salutary effects of exercise (as expressed in S. Weir Mitchell, *Wear and Tear* [Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1875]), Eakins's gift to him of a hunting

- picture deserves further scrutiny. S. Weir Mitchell, "The Case of George Dedlow," *Atlantic Monthly* 18, no. 105 (July 1866): 1–11; S. Weir Mitchell, "Phantom Limbs," *Lippincott's Magazine of Popular Literature and Science* 8, no. 30 (December 1871): 563–69; S. Weir Mitchell, *Injuries of Nerves and Their Consequences* (1872; reprint, New York: Dover, 1965). For recent discussions of Mitchell, see Debra Journet, "Phantom Limbs and 'Body-Ego': S. Weir Mitchell's 'George Dedlow,'" *Mosaic* 23, no. 1 (Winter 1990): 87–99; and Leslie Katz, "Flesh of His Flesh: Amputation in *Moby Dick* and S. W. Mitchell's Medical Papers," *Genders*, no. 4 (Spring 1989): 1–10. On Mitchell and Eakins, see Norma Lifton, "Thomas Eakins and S. Weir Mitchell: Images and Cures in the Late Nineteenth Century," in Mary Mathews Gedo, ed., *Psychoanalytic Perspectives on Art*, 3 vols. (Hillsdale, NJ.: Analytic Press, 1987), 2:247–75. Gustave Guillaumet's *The Desert (The Sahara)* of 1867, a dramatic orientalist depiction of a dead, decaying camel lying alone in a desert landscape bears a striking resemblance to *Whistling for Plover*; the work purportedly made a strong impression at the 1868 Paris Salon, where Eakins could have seen it (Stevens, *Orientalists*, 166, 83).
- 24** On the small oil sketch of a kneeling white hunter, owned by Mr. and Mrs. Andrew Wyeth, see William Innes Homer, Margaret Pyle Hassert, and Belena S. Chapp, eds., *Brandywine Valley to the Bay: Art from Private Collections* (Newark: University of Delaware Gallery, 1991), 49. The words *humble*, *humility*, and *humiliation* have their etymological root in the Latin *humus*, meaning "ground," "earth," "soil," which also relate to *humilis* and *humilitas*, connoting lowness, abjection, submission, and even animality. Eakins knew Latin well enough that such verbal associations could have colored his perceptions of hunter and supplicant.
- 25** Other paintings of the 1870s that include explicit self-representations are *Max Schmitt in a Single Scull* (1871, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York) and Eakins's famous *Gross Clinic* (1875, Jefferson Medical College of Thomas Jefferson University, Philadelphia).
- 26** Brian T. Allen, "Will Schuster and Blackman Going Shooting," in Wilmerding, *Thomas Eakins*, 88. Thomas Eakins to Jean-Léon Gérôme [1874], cited in Margaret McHenry, *Thomas Eakins Who Painted* (Oreland, Pa.: Privately printed, 1946), 39–40.
- 27** The inscription, which is difficult to see in reproductions, is noted by Lloyd Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins: His Life and Work* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1933), 166, cat. no. 68.
- 28** The dynamics of identification in this group of works has been discussed in Freudian terms by Fried, *Realism, Writing, Disfiguration*, esp. 66–68. In my view, Fried's analysis leaves out, or could be extended by, consideration of race as a factor in the unfolding of Eakins's subjectivity. Building upon Fried, I would suggest that in *The Artist and His Father Hunting Reed-Birds*, Eakins unconsciously drew an analogy between blackness and his own position as the "son" who succumbs to and identifies with the paternal(istic) figure. Exploring this notion further is beyond the scope of the present essay.

# Chapter Two. Eakins's Reality Effects

MICHAEL LEJA, 2001/2004

Thomas Eakins first came to public attention in the mid-1870s as a painter of water-sport subjects. In these early oils and watercolors, bird hunters quietly pole their boats through marshes or set out from shore under sail, and oarsmen slice through the reflective waters of Philadelphia's Schuylkill River. One of the earliest critical notices of these works, written by Eakins's friend and fellow painter Earl Shinn, appeared in the magazine *Nation* in 1874. Shinn introduced Eakins to a national readership in this way: "Some remarkably original and studious boating scenes were shown by Thomas Eakins, a new exhibitor, of whom we learn that he is a realist, an anatomist and mathematician; that his perspectives, even of waves and ripples, are protracted according to strict science."<sup>1</sup> Well over a century later, Eakins's art historical significance is rooted in his identity as a studious realist, whose painting draws its force from extensive scientific research into anatomy, perspective, reflection, and motion. He is credited with reinventing (or destroying) academic realism by filling its shell with scientific knowledge.<sup>2</sup> Combining close attention to visual appearances with systematic knowledge of structures, functions, and spatial relations, he generated likenesses of extraordinary intensity. In short, Eakins intensified his painted icons by merging seeing with knowing. (I am using "icon" as Charles Sanders Peirce defined it, as a sign that evokes its object through resemblance.)<sup>3</sup> This interpretation of Eakins's work remains resilient despite efforts by some scholars to advance alternative understandings of his "realism."

Eakins himself seems to have formulated his artistic objectives in these very terms. We know . . . that his devotion to the study of anatomy and perspective bordered on the fanatic. . . .

Knowledge enables close observation, and close observation brings knowledge. Eakins . . . articulates a belief in the harmonious reciprocity of seeing and knowing that is fundamental to his art. He was no Romantic dreaming of an innocent eye—quite the opposite. His fantasy of vision featured an omniscient eye. Truthful seeing demanded full and systematic knowledge of the laws of nature and of art. . . .

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Michael Leja, "Eakins and Icons," *Art Bulletin* 83 (September 2001): 479–97. Slightly revised as "Chapter Two. Eakins's Reality Effects," in his *Looking Askance: Skepticism and American Art from Eakins to Duchamp* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004), 59–92, notes 256–65. Abridged (2004). © 2004 by the Regents of the University of California. Reprinted by permission. Courtesy of the author.  
(<http://www.ucpress.edu/book.php?isbn=9780520249967>)

Several interpreters of Eakins's work—including such insightful and influential scholars as Lloyd Goodrich, Barbara Novak, Elizabeth Johns, and Kathleen Foster—have analyzed it in terms of an interaction between seeing and knowing. Although they have taken different approaches, they have generally mapped this interaction directly onto another: the interplay between graphic and painterly elements in Eakins's art. Science and measurement most often appear in the underdrawings and diagrammatic preparatory works, which provide a skeleton of knowledge that informs but does not limit the close observation, approximation of appearances, and crafting of a work of art accomplished in the skillful overpainting. Analysts generally have agreed that the conceptual and the perceptual, or the scientific and the artistic, merge in Eakins's work in the integration of graphic and painterly modes. Any tension arising between cognition and perception becomes a problem to be worked out in the relation of drawing to painting.<sup>4</sup>

I want to propose a different view: Eakins's commitment to truthful vision through systematic knowledge gave rise to irreconcilable conflicts, which animated his paintings. These conflicts were too pervasive and unruly to be contained within an opposition of drawing and painting. One conflict stemmed from the multiple systems of knowledge Eakins attempted to mobilize, which often resisted integration, and another, from a growing rift between knowing and seeing. That latter conflict in particular is the basis of Eakins's relevance to this book. His paintings try to remake realism for a world of illusions and deceptions. They strive to enhance the truthfulness of depictions by fortifying them with scientific principles, verifiable measurements, and knowledge of deep structures.

## WHAT IS AND WHAT SEEMS TO BE

*The Champion Single Sculls* of 1871, one of the first paintings Eakins exhibited, was an early and ambitious effort to see and render with a knowing eye. Although almost no preparatory studies for the painting have survived, there is every reason to believe that Eakins made many. Indeed, technical analysis has revealed pinholes and incised lines in the underpainting, evidence of a process involving transfer drawings.<sup>5</sup> Many commentators have remarked the acute observation and careful illusionism of the finished work. . . .

Even more striking than anatomy in this painting is Eakins's systematic study of linear perspective, which would have helped him situate the objects and reflections precisely in space and keep relationships of scale internally consistent. Equally important is his study of the physical principles of reflection. Most of the pictorial interest here is concentrated in the reflective

surface of the water. The painting is bisected horizontally by the waterline in the distance and at the right by the separation of the landmass from its reflection that invests the picture with a mirroring dynamic. The reflections are calibrated to give legible information about the distance of the objects; recession brings a proportional diminution of clarity, integrity, and contrast. The river's mirroring is interrupted only by the wakes of the sculls rowed by Schmitt and, beyond him, by Eakins himself. These dark interruptions in the reflected sky convey a narrative of movement through the picture space. Eakins's boat has entered at left and is shown following the river into the distance. Schmitt's is moving in the opposite direction, his wake revealing that a moment ago he stopped rowing and began dragging his oars over the water.

Eakins has taken obvious liberties to ensure the clarity and legibility of this narrative of movement and action. Most striking is the trail of perfectly intact rings that each rower has left marking the points where the oars were inserted into the water. Time has not dissipated them: the earliest remain as integral and discrete as the most recent. . . . While the rowers continue moving through time and space, the river arrests time by stilling and preserving on its surface the marks of the oars' contact. These undissipated rings are anachronisms: they compress past events into the painting's expanded present. The schematic marks representing the indexical traces of the oars' contact with the water juxtapose two temporalities. The wakes of the dragged oars signify continuity and duration, the series of rings, intervals in a structure of repetition. . . .

These departures from plausible appearances enhance narration and convey information. The undissipated and overabundant rings are temporal disturbances in the painting's narrative that paradoxically clarify the story pictured. Seeing the rings intact on the water surface enables the viewer to know more precisely the rower's spatial orientation and trajectory; like everything else in the painting, they have been rendered in careful perspective. The perfectly regular spacing of these rings and their compression also convey information about the elegance and consistency of the rowers' strokes. . . . The painter's conspicuous presence in midstroke stakes the picture's claim to firsthand information about the art of sculling. Eakins often represented himself as an earnest practitioner of the activity portrayed.<sup>6</sup> This gives him a double presence in his works: as knowing participant and as unseen painter-viewer, who in this case is the implicit object of Schmitt's piercing gaze. In this way Eakins's paintings literalize a dynamic of seeing and knowing. Sometimes this double presence generates explicit tensions—such as the blurring of genres (portraiture and quotidian scene) in this picture. . . .

In *The Champion Single Sculls*, Eakins's expertise as a rower is not only pictured but also reinforced by the perfectly spaced rings, the detailed information about boat design, and the precise hand and body positionings. That Eakins wished to highlight this information is suggested by the absence of some reflections that strict mimesis would have required. Where are those of the red-and-white latticework bridges in the distance, and of the extraordinary bright and wispy clouds that trail across the sky, the long central group echoing both the near scull and its frothy wake?<sup>7</sup> . . . Had they been included, they would most likely have obscured the painting's narrative of powerful and skillful movement through exquisitely plotted space. But their omission produces other effects, too. It gives the painting an unsettling sense of absence, and it enhances the water's presence as material substance with absorptive density as well as reflective capacities. . . .

In this painting Eakins's commitments to multiple forms of knowledge come into conflict. Information about the depicted space and about the fine art of sculling jostles against elaborate knowledge about the behavior of water surfaces and reflections. Fidelity to plausible appearances receives a relatively low priority, but the painterliness of some areas of this work signals another system of knowledge high in Eakins's hierarchy: the art of painting. The range of paint handlings shows his engagement in experimental if unsystematic study of the processes by which drawn and painted marks operate simultaneously as equivalents for things in the world and as literal presences capable of evoking affective responses.

. . .

Eakins devised an artistic process that was analytic, conceptual, and additive. He broke down his subjects into component parts, plotted and rendered according to systematic principles, and additively recombined.<sup>8</sup> Linear perspective put the boat and other objects in space; anatomical research modeled the figures; mathematical calculations generated the reflections; and so on. Just as Eakins did not need life study to set a boat in perspective, so he could calculate reflections systematically. He taught his students to rely on mathematical analysis: the angle of reflection equals the angle of incidence. Once they had learned the science, outdoor study of reflections and wave motion would hold no surprises.<sup>9</sup> . . .

The discordant collage of processes and techniques that constitutes the surface of Eakins's paintings bear witness to the overall sense of dissonance, as if the artist used a specially designed method of paint application to produce each section. Eakins's attention to the comparative study of painted marks can be seen in these canvases along with evidence, at a deep



level, of procedural discontinuity. Apparently, Eakins generally preferred to let stand any disjunctions generated in his additive process rather than try to conceal them. He did not turn to appearances to unify his awkward syntheses. "Strain your brain more than your eye," he is reported to have told his students.<sup>10</sup> He seems to have assumed that all knowledge systems would become perfectly integrated and fully congruent with appearances once the learning process was complete.

If we share that premise with Eakins, we may be inclined to treat seams and awkwardness in his paintings as signs of failure. The project, after all, was outrageously ambitious; imperfections were inevitable. This reasoning has made possible the conflicting emphases in the art-historical scholarship on Eakins: on the one hand, strong claims for the extraordinary knowledge and truthful observation mobilized in his paintings, and on the other, an insistent cataloguing of the disjunctions. Both elements were also present in the early critical responses to his work, which highlighted first its mimetic force and later its artifice and awkwardness. These conflicting emphases are actually two sides of a coin. The fractures in Eakins's paintings are inevitable, not because Eakins failed in his execution, but because his fundamental assumption was mistaken. Seeing and knowing could not be made congruent in mimetic painting.

The further problems that came with Eakins's growth as a painter clarify this point. A decisive rift between knowledge and appearances became explicit in *A May Morning in the Park*, also known as *The Fairman Rogers Four-in-Hand*, of 1879. One can extract much factual information from this painting, including the exact place in Fairmount Park where the scene is set. One can identify each figure by name, the horses as well as the men and women. One can classify the magnificent custom-built coach that was the pride of its owner and driver, Fairman Rogers, an engineer, a member of the board of directors of the Pennsylvania Academy, and Eakins's friend and supporter. Careful analysis of perspective in the work can establish the distance from which the scene was viewed and the precise placement in depth of each element. One can re-create the painstaking process by which the artist produced the painting from research, photographs, and preparatory works. Scholars have pursued all these avenues and collected all this information.<sup>11</sup>

This painting introduces a new knowledge system into Eakins's work: the analysis of motion found in Eadweard Muybridge's stop-action photography. In an essay drawing attention to Eakins's study of motion, Fairman Rogers articulated Eakins's thinking: "It is only by thoroughly understanding the mechanism of the motion that the artist will be able to

portray it in any satisfactory manner.”<sup>12</sup> Eakins’s fascination with motion photography has been well documented. . . . Here, as with some of his other scientific researches, Eakins was attempting to embed in a realist painting information beyond the reach of the naked eye. Once again the question was whether painting could remake appearances so as to enlarge their capacity to contain and display nonapparent truth.

Although Eakins took much from Muybridge’s photographs, he refused one of their features. The photographs stopped all motion and gave complete information about the forms understood to be moving. One could count the number of spokes in the carriage wheels if one wished. Eakins chose to handle his carriage wheels differently. Perhaps because he believed that the unfamiliar configuration of the horses’ legs might compromise the painting’s power to suggest motion, Eakins attempted to make the wheels of the carriage do that signifying work.<sup>13</sup> In place of the spokes in all four wheels he inserted odd markings that read as blurs. Viewers of this painting see the world through a vision fast enough to stop the legs of a horse but not the spokes of a spinning wheel. Those with experience in photography recognize the issue as one of shutter speed, a matter of a fraction of a second. The very illusionism of this painting implies a reference to photography. Although photography had opened a rift between seeing and knowing, to Eakins it also promised help healing that rift. And if conflict between seeing and knowing, here as in *Champion Single Sculls*, produces temporal disjunctions, photography now bears clear responsibility. Originally, as Roland Barthes observed, “cameras . . . were clocks for seeing.”<sup>14</sup>

Contemporary critics, perhaps discomfited by the conflict, disparaged the painting. To them, convention seemed truer than the truths revealed through science. Some construed the problem as an opposition between art and science, or between art and photography.<sup>15</sup> . . .

. . . The rift opening between what is and what appears, between the truths of scientific knowledge systems and the ambiguities or deceptions of perceptual experience, reveals the crux of the problem. It would become central to discussions of “instantaneous photography” in the 1880s. . . .

The questions, however, were trickier than . . . writers acknowledged. For example, what the eye can see may differ for different moving objects. When horses, like those in Eakins’s painting, are moving at moderate speed, human vision can readily take in all the animals’ legs at once. But perceptual and cognitive limitations prevent the organizing and processing of fleeting information about the relative positions of four legs moving simultaneously. The position of spinning spokes relative to one another remains

completely consistent, so viewers have no trouble organizing the elements mentally. But at high speeds persistence of vision prevents the human eye from following the movement of individual spokes. (This may not have been the case for the limited speed represented in Eakins's painting, but no matter.) Eakins may have been able to use this distinction to justify his decision to copy from Muybridge's photographs but omit the stilled spokes. But would he have wanted to assign a shutter speed to normal human vision? And would he have been willing to accept that limit to the knowledge a painting could contain—a limit based on the capabilities of unassisted vision?

One thing seems clear: the scientific research Eakins conducted was proving more an obstacle to realist painting than an armature for it. The knowledge systems he drew into his analytic and additive process inevitably produced tensions and conflicts. . . . Eakins was forced to make difficult choices. And if these didn't trouble him enough, he also bumped up continually against the limits of the seen world to contain and display truthful information. His determination to reach and surpass those limits was an inexhaustible source of pictorial conflicts.

As truthful knowledge moved further from the domain of ordinary appearances, the practices and convictions of a painter such as Eakins proved harder to sustain. Photography, modern science, and other developments associated with modernity undermined confidence in the harmonious reciprocity of knowledge and appearances. Even as motion studies like Muybridge's pointed the way toward the powerful illusionism of cinema, illusionistic painting's claims to truthfulness and realism came to ring hollow.<sup>16</sup>

## ICONS AND EYE CONS, DIAGRAMS AND ILLUSIONS

...  
The blurs interest me because they do not fit easily the principle I cited earlier regarding Eakins's artistic achievement. If Eakins here, as elsewhere, intensified his painted icons by merging seeing with knowing, the blur must be understood as an iconic sign. That is, it will be taken to resemble the phenomenological form in which spinning spokes present themselves to human vision. Kathleen Foster asserts such a view: "In painting the entire wheel blurred, Eakins made a concession to human perception and the visual logic of his art, anticipating that a correctly photographic depiction would look unnatural in his painting."<sup>17</sup> The theorists of instantaneous photography generally believed that blurred spokes were truer to human vision. . . . Had Eakins wished an alternative to Muybridge's example, a developed tradition of painting moving wheels offered other possibilities. The problem of the

wheel in motion had interested artists at least since Leonardo, and it was a controversial matter during the seventeenth century. In Eakins's time instantaneous photography was reviving interest in an old problem.<sup>18</sup>

...

Perhaps the blur was so securely associated with photography that Eakins's device would have operated as a photographic reference. Eakins certainly made this connection. On first seeing Muybridge's photographs, he wrote that it was "pretty to see the sharp & blurred motion in these photographs. They mark so nicely the relative speed of the different parts." Eakins paid close attention to the spokes of the wheels and noted that not all of them were entirely sharp. "[The] sulky wheels are blurred above and sharp below, because the upper part travels twice as fast as the hub while the lower part is still."<sup>19</sup> . . .

Although a blur appearing in a photograph would not resemble Eakins's spokes, it might function in the same semiotic register. That is, Eakins's painted blurs might inherit something of the hybrid semiotic identity of photographic blurs, which are simultaneously icons and indexes of movement, to revert to the terminology of Peirce. In a photograph a blur is a physical effect of the movement of reflected light imprinted on a photographic plate, which makes it an index. Like many indexes, it may very well be illegible in itself and require auxiliary iconic and indexical signs to establish its signification of movement and its resemblance to the look of moving forms.<sup>20</sup> That Eakins's spokes would be illegible in isolation is certainly true, though such an effect is far from unusual in his paintings. The blurs might even more plausibly be understood as symbols, if we compare them to familiar conventional notations like those of cartoon graphics.

. . . My point is that the blurred spokes of *May Morning* are to some significant extent nonmimetic signs for motion. They show that in merging knowledge and vision, Eakins often does more than simply intensify icons (whatever that may mean); he alters their character. One way of describing the effect is to say that Eakins conflates two forms of resemblance: that of the diagram and that of the illusion.<sup>21</sup> This description would apply to the peculiar signs in *The Champion Single Sculls*—the overactive, condensed wake and the undissipated rings. Here icons dislocated temporally from the context that gives them illusionistic legitimacy shift to a diagrammatic function. The stacked rings do not mimic what would be observed in nature; instead, they effectively signify elegant rowing to a viewer prepared to read them as schematic markings on a map.<sup>22</sup> The result may be an intensification of iconicity, but these two forms of icon do not blend easily. Combining the abstraction

and timelessness of the diagram with the contingency and immediacy of illusionism might be expected to result in exactly the disjunctions and seams we have been noticing in Eakins's paintings—and just the sorts of time warps I have described.

A second way of describing the semiotic effect of Eakins's marriage of seeing and knowing is to say that it sometimes moves his signs entirely away from resemblance and toward other semiotic strategies. That some of Eakins's icons *migrate* into other semiotic classifications may seem surprising in a painting cherished for its rich illusionism, but Eakins was drawn to that strategy on many occasions. His efforts to make illusionistic painting a vehicle for nonapparent truths often led him away from mimesis toward semiotic adventurousness.

...

Having pushed illusionism to the limits of its capacity to contain information—to the point where knowledge systems jostled and displaced one another—Eakins understood that the information and truth content of his mimetic signs could be supplemented through indexes, diagrams, and symbols. The way toward increasing the truthfulness of paintings was not through strict mimesis but through semiotic hybridity.<sup>23</sup> His paintings point the way toward modernist work on signs taken up in cubism, futurism, collage, and dada, and they reveal the logic of one hallmark of modernism: wariness about the relation of picture and world.<sup>24</sup>

## DISJUNCTIONS AND TRUTH

"By what art or mystery, what craft of selection, omission or commission, does a given picture of life appear to us to surround its theme, its figures and images, with the air of romance while another picture close beside it may affect us as steeping the whole matter in the element of reality?"<sup>25</sup> Henry James recognized that the power of a novel or a painting to warrant the description "realistic" was no straightforward matter. Roland Barthes, Nelson Goodman, W.J.T. Mitchell, and many others have illuminated the complexities of this issue. Instead of concentrating solely on the relation of the picture to what it represents, they have shifted attention to the relation between viewer and picture. The perception of iconicity—that is, judging a picture to be realistic, or even merely to resemble what it depicts—is as much an effect of operations involving beliefs, conventions, habits, values, interests, and power relations as it is of skilled artistic imitation.<sup>26</sup>

For some time now the idea that Eakins's paintings provide faithful transcriptions of the seen world has been unconvincing. Shifting the empha-

sis to the scientific knowledge compressed into his likenesses may correspond better with Eakins's own conception of his artistic project, and it may make some room for disjunctions in the paintings, but it does not solve fundamental problems. One kind of fidelity to reality merely replaces another.

I have argued that a premise of Eakins's art—that seeing and knowing are fundamentally congruent—is untenable, and that his efforts to make them congruent generated pictorial disjunctions as inevitably as they produced fragmentary and partial likenesses. I now want to propose that these disjunctions served a purpose essential to Eakins's realism. They were integral to the rhetoric of his paintings because they signaled to viewers commitment to a particular kind of truthful rendering of a real subject. That is to say, the seams in Eakins's paintings were not obstacles to his realism but essential vehicles of his art's reality effects.<sup>27</sup>

In [these] . . . analyses of Eakins's paintings, I have proceeded from certain peculiarities and discrepancies (missing reflections, undissipated rings of water, ambiguous temporalities, nonmimetic signification) to inferences about the artist's analytic, additive, research-oriented process and his commitment to representing knowledge. In so doing I have meant to demonstrate the reasonableness of an interpretative maneuver solicited by Eakins's art. The disjunctions characteristic of his paintings invite interpretation as effects of conflict between highly articulated ordering systems or of the enforced compression of knowledge into appearances. The paintings thus signal their commitment to a particular realism: one not of shallow mimicry but of likenesses grounded in reliable, systematic, bedrock knowledge and natural laws.

The fractures in Eakins's illusions distinguish his art from a kind of realism that simulates surface appearances in an intricate web of illusion (as in William Harnett's *trompe l'oeil* paintings), as well as from a realism that employs pictorial theatrics to draw viewers into sensational exoticism and eroticism (as in the works of French academicism)—from any realism that employs trickery to deceive viewers. "To get these things is not dexterity or a trick. No—it's knowledge," Eakins told his students.<sup>28</sup> . . .

Eakins distinguished his illusionism from deceptive and theatrical forms in part by preventing viewers from entering too easily into the imaginative space of the painting. His pictorial discrepancies and fractures, among other devices, positioned viewers outside the work and elicited their critical and analytical scrutiny.<sup>29</sup> The effect resembles Brechtian estrangement, although the critical distance it promotes adheres to an ideology of science rather than a theory of political and ideological demystification.

The ruptures in Eakins's paintings also conveyed the artist's process as one characterized by study and labor. These qualities, heavily emphasized in the critical commentary on his art, differentiated his work from the effortless artifice of Whistlerian aestheticism.<sup>30</sup> The contrast of Eakins's style with other contemporary styles secured an understanding of his realism as one committed to scientific knowledge and opposed to simplification, ease, shortcuts, trickery, fraud, and deception. "He has acquired this knowledge and skill by arduous study, study not confined to outward phenomena, but dealing with constituents, from the skeleton to the skin."<sup>31</sup> As I have suggested, the disjunctions did not do that work alone; the message was also carried by the information- and knowledge-packed forms that filled the paintings as well as by the publicity that surrounded Eakins's work. . . .

It may seem paradoxical that the seams and disjunctions, the non-iconic elements, of Eakins's paintings intensified their realist claims, but reality effects always come from some configuration of selections and contrivances that enhances the persuasiveness of the representation for a particular audience. "The spectator's approval is not solicited, but extorted" by Eakins's work, according to Shinn.<sup>32</sup> The question we must ask is, Under what cultural and historical circumstances would Eakins's particular interruptions and fractures assist, not to say extort, a viewer's assent to a painting's truthfulness? I turn to that question in a moment.

Readers no doubt wonder whether I am attributing to all Eakins's viewers, including his contemporaries, the model of response that I have described. There is no shortage of evidence that contemporary critics regularly noticed disjunctions in Eakins's work. . . .

. . . As often as not, Eakins's contemporaries found in his realism "errors," "mannerisms," and "discordancies" that estranged them from the paintings while reminding them of his knowledge and skill. That general response—disruptions alienate and point back to scientific process—displays remarkable consistency across the Eakins literature, although the features of the paintings that provoked the response have varied considerably.

. . . Paradoxically, the pattern of response I am tracing is most evident when a painting is perceived to exceed the acceptable limits of disjunction and therefore to fail as realism. When the reality effect operates at maximum effectiveness—that is, when the impression of realism is most powerful—there is little or no conscious awareness of disjunctions (and, thus, no evidence of their functioning). I envision them registering as an unconscious disturbance or inarticulate intuition, a vague sense that something is not quite right, unaccompanied by the desire or ability to pinpoint the problem.

To be but partly aware of anachronisms, or semiotic inconsistencies, or missing reflections in a painting does not mean that one is unaffected by them. Eakins's reality effect would have operated most efficiently when his disjunctions subliminally signified research, science, and additive knowledge without producing confusion or distress. Ideally, a viewer would find truthful an illusion that nonetheless contained indescribable elements resistant to ordinary, habitual processing of likenesses.

This was a hard balance to achieve; moreover, the point of maximum effectiveness would differ for different audiences. What worked for Eakins's contemporary followers would not necessarily work for twenty-first-century art historians. Yet the claims for his realism have continued alongside fascination with his disjunctions. It is difficult to account for these persistent conflicting emphases in the reception of his work unless they are understood as two sides of a single coin.

Nelson Goodman has argued that the realism perceived in a picture arises not from the quantity of information provided but from the ease with which it is read. According to this interpretation, the more stereotypical and familiar the conceptual classifications and modes of representation that generate an image, the more natural and true it will seem.<sup>33</sup> In other words, we should understand realism as a phenomenon in which learned codes are matched so closely that communication is transparent. But if that description accurately explains the realism operating in, say, stock photography, it does not account for realisms which belong rather to the tradition that stakes its claim to truth on calculated departures from familiar modes of seeing and knowing.<sup>34</sup> Such departures present themselves as signs that mere conventions have been left behind in the pursuit of a more accurate matching of experience. This happens especially when established codes have lost some credibility. In such cultural situations, opacity may be an effective sign of realism in a picture, insofar as the difficulties and disjunctions register as marks of the hard work of seeing and representing clearly and truly.<sup>35</sup> The many devices responsible for the disjunctions in Eakins's paintings—analytic process, scientific research, emphatic application of systematic knowledge, precarious balancing of knowledge systems, selective use of photographic references, intermixing of diagrammatic icons, and other kinds of semiotic hybridity—were deployed in pursuit of truth beyond surface appearances and beyond conventions.

. . .



## REALISM AND MODERNISM

A simplistic understanding of realism as intensified iconicity was implicit in the modernist critique of realist art as false and deceptive—an art of illusions portraying illusions. Eakins's work forces a rethinking of the opposition of realism to modernism by refusing to be contained by that definition and by incorporating into a realist art semiotic experiments similar to those modernist artists were conducting. A modern realism, Eakins painting argues, must find creative ways to overcome the limitations of vision, of appearances, and of mimesis as instruments for knowing and representing the world. In his paintings he relentlessly tested all three limits—of the unaided eye to discern truthful information in the aspects of things, of the surface of the world to contain and display truth, of resemblance as a tool for representing knowledge and truth.

...

By indicating a different path toward modernist representation and by appropriating science for academic realism, Eakins's art complicates the familiar counterposing of realism and modernism in turn-of-the-century art. His case invites a far-reaching reconstruction of these inherited stylistic classifications. . . .

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- 1 Earl Shinn [Edward Strahan, pseud.], "Notes," *Nation*, Mar. 12, 1874, 172. The works in question were four watercolors Eakins contributed to the annual exhibition of the American Society of Painters in Watercolors in 1874.
  - 2 Clement Greenberg wrote that Eakins "reentered academic painting, to destroy it by its own logic," in "Review of Two Exhibitions of Thomas Eakins," *Nation*, July 1, 1944; reprinted in *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*, ed. John O'Brien, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 222.
  - 3 In Peirce's terminology, a sign signifies some object to an interpretant. The terms "index," "icon," and "symbol" are Peirce's designations for three principal relations between signs and objects. Indexes are signs that have a real, physical relation with their object, as a spot in the carpet is a sign of a past accident involving spilled wine. Icons signify by resemblance: a portrait painting is an icon of a sitter. And symbols signify by convention: a certain configuration of stars and stripes is a symbol for the United States. For a selection of Peirce's writings on signs, see *Peirce on Signs*, ed. James Hoopes (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991).
  - 4 See Barbara Novak, "Thomas Eakins, Science and Sight," in *American Painting of the Nineteenth Century: Realism, Idealism, and the American Experience* (New York: Praeger, 1969); Elizabeth Johns, "Drawing Instruction at Central High School and Its Impact on Thomas Eakins," *Winterthur Portfolio* 15 (summer 1980): 139–49; Lloyd Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins*, 2 vols., The Ailsa Mellon Bruce Studies in American Art series (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press for the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C., 1982); and Kathleen A. Foster, "Drawing: Thinking Made Visible," in *Thomas Eakins Rediscovered: Charles Bregler's Thomas Eakins Collection at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts; New Haven: Yale University Press), 1997.

- 5 See Christina Currie, "Thomas Eakins under the Microscope: A Technical Study of the Rowing Paintings," in *Thomas Eakins: The Rowing Pictures*, ed. Helen Cooper, exh. cat., Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, 1996, 92–96.
- 6 In addition to *The Champion Single Sculls*, Eakins portrayed himself in *The Biglin Brothers Turning the Stake* (1873), *The Artist and His Father Hunting Reed Birds in the Cohansey Marshes* (1874), *The Gross Clinic* (1875), *Swimming* (1885), and *The Agnew Clinic* (1889). For further examples and discussion, see Michael Fried, *Realism, Writing, Disfiguration: On Thomas Eakins and Stephen Crane* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 12–13.
- 7 Fried, *ibid.*, 47, notes that the clouds lack reflections and that they resemble the foreground boat.
- 8 As a student Eakins made a conscious decision to pursue this sort of process. "All the progress that I have made until today has been the result of discoveries that have allowed me to divide my powers and means of working. Always divide to begin as strongly as possible" quoted from the notebook Eakins kept during his travels in Spain in 1869–70, in Foster, *Thomas Eakins Rediscovered*, 50. Charles Bregler quoted Eakins teaching his students this approach: "In mathematics the complicated things are reduced to simple things. So it is in painting. You reduce the whole thing to simple factors. You establish these, and work out from them, pushing them toward one another. This will make strong work" (Bregler, "Thomas Eakins as a Teacher," *The Arts* [March 1931]: 384).
- 9 See some of the illustrations Eakins prepared for his drawing manual, reproduced in Foster, *Thomas Eakins Rediscovered*, 346–47. Foster notes that where reflections are generated geometrically, "they do not seem to have been studied outdoors" (127). See also Charles Bregler's notes on Eakins's lectures, included in Kathleen Foster and Cheryl Leibold, eds., *Writing about Eakins: The Manuscripts in Charles Bregler's Thomas Eakins Collection* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989), 123.
- 10 The quotation is from Bregler, "Thomas Eakins as a Teacher," pt. 1, 383, and continues (385): "You can copy a thing to a certain limit. Then you must use intellect."
- 11 See especially Foster, *Thomas Eakins Rediscovered*, 151–62; and Gordon Hendricks, "A May Morning in the Park," *Bulletin of the Philadelphia Museum of Art* 60 (spring 1965): 48–64.
- 12 Fairman Rogers, "The Zootrope," *Art Interchange*, July 9, 1879, 3.
- 13 *Ibid.*, 57. Hendricks writes that Eakins "had to decide between making the horses look as if they were in motion (according to the tastes of the time), and making them look as he knew—from the Muybridge photographs—they actually were. He also had to decide the same matter about the wheels of the coach."
- 14 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 15.
- 15 The most colorful commentary is retrospective and appears in an unsigned review of Muybridge's *Animal Locomotion*, "New Publications. Wonders of the Camera," *New York Times*, Mar. 5, 1888: 3: "The horses looked as if struck by a petrifying disease in their places: the coach was also stationary, in sympathy with the team, but the wheels were whirling like the pin-borne fireworks sacred to St. Catherine." In *Muybridge: Man in Motion* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976), 157, Robert Haas, in asserting that Muybridge wrote this excerpt, must be mistaken.
- 16 William Homer has suggested that Eakins's work was moving toward film and the production of an illusion of motion. He writes, "If Eakins had continued his photographic experiments, he, instead of Marcy or Edison, might conceivably have become the father of the motion picture process" (Homer and John Talbot, "Eakins, Muybridge and the Motion Picture Process," *Art Quarterly* 26 [summer 1963]: 213). I think this statement mistakes the analytic emphasis of Eakins's motion studies. May

*Morning* and other works show Eakins more uninterested in truth to structural principles than in illusionism. That he did not move in the direction of simulating movement in photography was no accident.

- 17 Foster, *Thomas Eakins Rediscovered*, 269 n. 41.
- 18 For useful overview of blurred wheels in Western European painting, see Alexander Sturgis, *Telling Time* (London: National Gallery, 2000), 43–49.
- 19 Eakins quoted from a page of undated notes—possibly a draft of a letter to Rogers—in the Bregler collection, quoted in Foster, *Thomas Eakins Rediscovered*, 151, 269 n. 41.
- 20 A conversation with Joel Snyder helped me to clarify these issues.
- 21 Rogers “The Zootrope,” 2, describes Eakins as diagramming movement.
- 22 On the possibility of changing the status of a sign through changing its context, see Michael Leja, “Peirce, Visuality, and Art,” *Representations* 72 (fall 2000): 97–122.
- 23 Arguing for Eakins’s involvement in a thematics of writing, Fried, *Realism, Writing, Disfiguration*, 15, has drawn attention to the artist’s interest in “graphic notational systems of all kinds.” His discussion, 122, of *The Gross Clinic* also moves into the field of semiotics when he notes that blood and paint are treated as “tokens” or “natural equivalents” of each another.
- 24 In a discussion of Picasso’s work in collage around 1912, Rosalind Krauss argues that the use of signs shifts from an iconic to a symbolic representational system. Eakins’s blurs represent an analogous phenomenon emerging within a realist project. Krauss, “The Motivation of the Sign,” in *Picasso and Braque: A Symposium*, ed. William Rubin et al. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1992), 261–86.
- 25 Henry James, preface to *The American* (New York: Scribner’s, 1907), xiv.
- 26 Roland Barthes, “The Reality Effect,” in *French Literary Theory Today*, ed. Tzvetan Todorov (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 11–17; Nelson Goodman, esp. “Imitation” and “Realism,” in *Languages of Art* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1976), 6–10, 34–39; W. J. T. Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), esp. 53–94. One need not take an extreme relativist position on the issue of realism (that perception of mimetic truthfulness is entirely contingent and learned) to recognize the role of nonillusionistic factors in Eakins’s reception as a realist.
- 27 A few interpreters have discussed reality effects in Eakins’s medical subjects. Fried, discussing *The Gross Clinic* in *Realism, Writing, Disfiguration*, argues against analyzing the painting as a faithful transcription of an original scene. He notes that this “tautological argument from reality” is characteristic of scholarly analyses of this painting and of Eakins’s work generally. Jennifer Doyle recasts this argument to attribute to the painting a power to seduce viewers with a fantasy of origins, which she describes as one of “realism’s definitive effects.” The question, she writes, is “how [The Gross Clinic] generates an effect of the real through its solicitation of a particular kind of epistemological attention from the viewer” (Doyle, “Sex, Scandal, and Thomas Eakins’s *The Gross Clinic*,” *Representations* 68 [fall 1999]: 1–33). Bridget Goodbody has argued that the realism of *The Agnew Clinic* is rooted in a dynamics of power involving the authority of medical discourse. The painting uses “a mechanics of displaced desire . . . to trick the viewer into being an accomplice to the patient’s ravishment. . . . This is precisely what allows the viewer to believe the fiction of *The Agnew Clinic*’s realism” (Goodbody, “The Present Opprobrium of Surgery: *The Agnew Clinic* and Nineteenth Century Representations of Cancerous Female Breasts,” *American Art* 8 [winter 1994]: 33–51).

28 Eakins, quoted in Bregler, "Thomas Eakins as a Teacher," pt. 1, 383.

29 Fried, *Realism, Writing, Disfiguration*, 73, has described Eakins's paintings as animated by an acute tension between "projective" and "pictorial" modes of seeing. The paintings produce conflicting desires "to project oneself imaginatively into the represented scene" and "to keep one's distance and apprehend the painting as an object of 'pictorial' seeing." My own view is quite close to Fried's at this point, although I think he overdramatizes the tension in the work. Moreover, his interpretation differs from mine in situating this tension in Eakins's rival commitments to writing and drawing on the one hand and to painting on the other and in the psychobiographical factors implicated in this dual commitment.

30 The laboriousness of Eakins's paintings was a significant feature of the critical commentary on his work. "The industry and endeavor to be true are readily acknowledged," wrote one anonymous critic, ("The Academy of Design," *New York Times*, Mar. 30, 1882, 5). In *Art Amateur*, Shinn noted that Eakins's paintings were "without any labor-saving ideas of brush work or texture." (Shinn, "The Pennsylvania Academy Exhibition," *Art Amateur* [May 1881]: 115.) Eakins also presented himself, through manner, clothing, and studio ambience, as a laborer or workman rather than an aesthete. After visiting Eakins in 1881, critic Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer noted that his studio contained so many anatomical models that it resembled a butcher's shop rather than the refined aesthetic environment that artists such as William Merritt Chase preferred. Eakins's look and manner to her resembled those of an inventor or a mechanic rather than an artist. See her letter to Sylvester Koehler, quoted in Lois Dinerstein, "Thomas Eakins's *Crucifixion* as Perceived by Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer," *Arts* 53 (May 1979): 140-45.

Eakins literally juxtaposed his own painting with Whistler's in *Music* (1904), which shows a violinist and a pianist in performance. Eakins reproduces Whistler's painting of the Spanish violinist Sarasate in the upper right corner of the painting. The small size of the copied painting indicates either that it hangs in the distant background or that it refers to a reduced-scale reproduction. The juxtaposition of the two violinists emphasizes the difference in painting styles; Whistler's musician is flattened and disembodied in comparison with Eakins's painstakingly rendered figure. At the same time, *Music* likens Whistler's willful flaunting of the artifice of painting, evoking things in the world through suggestive painted signs for them, to the semiotic daring involved in Eakins's appropriation and handling of Whistler's work. Eakins's calculated placement of Sarasate in the very corner of his painting and the simulation of Whistler's style ensured that the quotation would provoke comparison not only of the violinists but also of the painters. See Steven Nash's catalogue entry for *Music* in *Masterworks at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery*, ed. Karen Lee Spaulding (New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1999), 66. I am grateful to Kathleen Pyne for suggesting the relevance of this painting for my argument.

31 *Philadelphia Press*, Nov. 25, 1880, quoted in Hendricks, "A May Morning in the Park," 61.

32 Shinn, "The Pennsylvania Academy Exhibition," 115.

33 Goodman, "Imitation and Realism," in *Languages of Art*.

34 In contrast to Goodman, *ibid.*, Fried sees the history of artistic realism as one in which "tactics of shock, violence, perceptual distortion, and physical outrage were mobilized against prevailing conventions of the representation of the human body specifically in order to produce a new and stupefyingly powerful experience of the 'real'" (*Realism, Writing, Disfiguration*, 64).

35 Goodman's argument in *Languages of Art* has been criticized by Mitchell, *Iconology*, 72-73, on the grounds that styles of depiction can become "familiar, habitual, and standard" without ever being regarded as "realistic." I agree with Mitchell that "'realism' cannot simply be equated with the familiar standard of depiction but must be understood as a special project within a tradition of representation." Nonetheless, within this enlarged conception of realism, familiarity and unfamiliarity do play significant roles. See also W. J. T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1994).

# Photographs and the Making of Paintings

MARK TUCKER AND NICA GUTMAN, 2001

From its emergence, photography shaped the standards and expectations of artists, critics, and the public as to what paintings could and should be. Among painters who responded most directly to the challenges and potential of photographic vision in the period of Eakins's training and activity as an artist were those working in highly academic styles. One of the foremost attractions for such painters, including Eakins, was photography's capacity to reconcile immediacy and perfect accuracy, to "preserve records of transient and beautiful effects, of difficult poses, and of unusual combinations of line."<sup>1</sup> Photography also held the potential to assist with or even substitute for a fundamental practice in academic painting—drawing.<sup>2</sup> Even to those who criticized photographic qualities in painting, the usefulness of photography for gathering and studying subject matter was undeniable, "plac(ing) at the artist's disposal a vast amount of information about detail . . . quite unattainable with the pencil."<sup>3</sup> These advantages were of central relevance to painters in the French academic realist and naturalist milieus to which Eakins was drawn and in which he trained in the late 1860s.<sup>4</sup> Further, for naturalist painters, whose work was committed to the dispassionate and objective treatment of contemporary subjects, the modernity that photographic vision conferred on a painting was valued both for its suggestion of contemporaneity and as a release from stale academic formulas. As the pursuit of photographic "scientific" literalism (and the direct appropriation of photographic images) in naturalist painting of the 1870s attests, Paris, toward the end of the previous decade, had been a center of mounting interest in linking the visual qualities and practical advantages of photography to painting. Eakins was there and surely regarded the prospect with interest.

Artists training in Paris in the late 1860s were quite aware of the use of photographs by established painters (including Eakins's teacher Jean-Léon Gérôme and also, apparently, Léon Bonnat).<sup>5</sup> They were no doubt also debating the possible and proper relationship between photography and painting, for set against the appeal of photography's aesthetic qualities and practical applications were deeply rooted prejudices concerning the relation-

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Mark Tucker and Nica Gutman, "Photographs and the Making of Paintings," in *Thomas Eakins*, exhibition organized by Darrel Sewell (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2001), 225-38, notes 407-10. Abbreviated. © Philadelphia Museum of Art. Reprinted by permission.

ship between artistic talent or genius and academic skill in observation, recollection, composition, and drawing.<sup>6</sup> A painter's dependence upon photographs could be viewed as weakness in or underdevelopment of these fundamentals. Thus, while the increasingly common use of photographs by painters was widely recognized, it was rarely condoned unreservedly.<sup>7</sup> Apprehensions about others' judgments concerning the artistic legitimacy of using photographs as direct sources for paintings led some artists to understate their involvement in the practice.<sup>8</sup> Others worked secretly. . . .

Like many of his contemporaries, Eakins was discreet regarding the extent and methods of his use of photographic studies. One critic responding to Eakins's *Crucifixion* hailed him as "the greatest draughtsman in America."<sup>9</sup> In the face of such praise, Eakins must have sensed the risk of discredit were it to become widely known that some of his paintings made use of photography for the accuracy of their drawing. . . . In 1930 Eakins's widow Susan stated: "Eakins only used a photograph when impossible to get information in the way he preferred, painting from the living, moving model. He disliked working from a photograph, and absolutely refused to do so in a portrait."<sup>10</sup> She herself had appeared both in Eakins's photographs and in paintings made from them, but her denial that Eakins used photographs as an aid in making paintings testifies to her misgivings about public acceptance of the practice decades after the fact.<sup>11</sup>

Based on the few known direct-source photographs used by Eakins before those in the Charles Bregler Collection were brought to light in 1985, there would have been little reason to doubt Susan Eakins's insistence that her husband disliked using photographs. The survival in the Bregler material of a significant number of photographic sources for Eakins's paintings is a seeming miracle, considering the apparent desire among those close to him to prevent any such direct comparison with his paintings. These photographs prove Eakins's intensive involvement with photography was very much driven and guided by its potential application to the making of paintings. In fact, he used photographs as literal source images for paintings on a number of occasions; at the outset of the present study, however, the process linking photographs to finished paintings was unknown.

In technical examinations of Eakins's paintings based on extant photographic studies, we discovered working methods specific to his direct use of photographs. These same methods have also been identified in paintings for which source photographs are not known, leading us to conclude that Eakins's direct appropriation of photographic images was more widespread than previously believed. His work with photography is now one of the best

documented and most ambitious instances of its use by a nineteenth-century painter as an extension of or substitute for traditional approaches to the creation and use of preparatory images.<sup>12</sup>

Eakins relied upon a number of different techniques and mediums to develop pictorial ideas. His preparatory work was often singularly thorough and complex, involving at times combinations of drawn, painted, or photographic studies of compositions, figures, or objects, as well as an occasional sculptural study. For the most part, the works produced for such preliminary study held little lasting interest for Eakins. The considerable effort that might be put toward preparatory work was justified by its end product: an image or set of images to be transferred to canvas or watercolor paper to provide a guide for the lay-in of paint. Eakins accomplished such transfer of drawn, painted, or photographic studies by a number of more or less traditional techniques investigated in previous technical studies.<sup>13</sup> We have identified two additional transfer techniques that relate exclusively to Eakins' use of photographs as source images for his paintings.

Eakins probably acquired his own camera in 1880,<sup>14</sup> and among the earliest paintings to utilize his photographic studies are the 1881-82 group of four oils and three watercolors related to shad fishing on the Delaware River at Gloucester, New Jersey. The techniques linking these photographs and paintings reveal an extraordinary vision and ingenuity and also provide a means for tracking the larger course of Eakins's use of photographs in painting.

Our study began with extremely close examinations of three oil paintings from this Gloucester group . . . using infrared reflectography (IRR), a technique often useful for capturing images of subsurface features of paintings, such as changes from one paint layer to the next or underdrawings that set out an entire composition or individual elements.<sup>15</sup> In the IRR images, pencil-drawn horizon lines (common in Eakins's paintings) were evident, but signs of his previously known transfer techniques were absent. Underdrawings were found, but not of a type previously seen in any Eakins work.

...

These underdrawings were not conventional drawings after the photographic images but direct tracings from them. Tracing from a photographic image onto an opaque watercolor sheet or primed canvas could have been accomplished by several methods.<sup>16</sup> The particular character of the drawings, however, made it clear that Eakins was doing something quite unexpected: he was projecting the photographic images onto his painting supports in order to make the underdrawings.<sup>17</sup> This practice, never before detected in

Eakins's work, was hardly novel by the 1880s, or even by the time Eakins was beginning to study art in the 1860s. Methods for producing enlarged photographic prints or tracings on canvas via projection were developing from at least the mid-1850s.<sup>18</sup> Eakins's tracing may have been accomplished easily using a magic lantern or similar device that would have been readily available. . . .<sup>19</sup>

Projection not only allowed efficient transfer of source photographic images onto his painting supports, but also simplified the process of combining elements from different photographs, an idea of much interest to Eakins. . . .

In contrast to the highly detailed traced underdrawings for many parts of the Gloucester oils, the left foreground figure group in the Philadelphia *Shad Fishing at Gloucester on the Delaware River* and all the figures in *Mending the Net* . . . show no evidence of underdrawing whatsoever, nor the use of any other transfer technique known to have been used by him. . . . What was noted, looking at the painting surface with a microscope at 15 to 30 times magnification, was a previously unnoticed type of auxiliary reference mark related to the transfer of source images: short, freehand horizontal and vertical lines, crosses, Ts, or sections of contour, incised with a needlelike stylus into the paint at various stages during the painting of the figures. They occur at logical reference points for the construction of the figures: at extreme limits of the height or width of forms, junctions of external or internal contours, abrupt breaks in the direction of lines, and transitions between the lit and shaded sides of forms. It is not surprising that these marks eluded earlier studies; the size of most is well below the threshold of acute close vision, and Eakins himself would have needed to work with a magnifying glass or loupe of at least 10 times magnification to make use of them. They would have been undetectable even with a hand lens of the kind viewers interested in his technique might have used. Critics (and certainly other artists) were on the lookout for the secrets of the striking verisimilitude in paintings at the time; two of Eakins's works shown at the 1875 Paris Salon<sup>20</sup> elicited the following wry remark from a French critic: "These two canvases (which M. Eakins has sent us from Philadelphia), each containing two hunters in a boat, resemble photographic prints covered with a light watercolor tint to such a degree that one asks oneself whether these are not specimens of a still secret industrial process, and that the inventor may have maliciously sent them to Paris to upset M. Detaille and frighten the *école française*."<sup>21</sup>

Unlike other transfer methods used to establish drawings on the canvas before painting, the incised marks were made at various stages during



the buildup of paint. Eakins was obviously relying on repeated direct reference to the source image on the surface of the painting as he worked. As he had done for the traced underdrawings, Eakins was again projecting the source photographs onto the painting's surface. This had a truly revolutionary aspect: no actual drawing was ever made for the photographically accurate foreground group in the Philadelphia *Shad Fishing* and the single and grouped figures in *Mending the Net*. With this "virtual drawing" technique Eakins had severed the tie between preparatory drawing and perfection of complex, detailed form in paint.<sup>22</sup>

... Working (as he had for the traced underdrawings) in a somewhat darkened studio, Eakins projected individual photographs of single figures or groups onto the paintings. He made his tiny marks, a few at a time, locating key reference points to paint a specific part of a figure. He then covered over the projector's lens and must have let in more daylight, to better judge colors being applied and to make it easier to see tones and details in the reference photographs. He projected the image repeatedly, as needed, to check the congruence of the painted image with the photograph and to make the next set of marks. ...

... The incised reference marks and auxiliary datum lines underdrawn in pencil so specifically and distinctly related to Eakins's use of projected source photographs have been found in a number of other cases. Their presence in paintings for which source photographs are not known is positive evidence that photographs were nonetheless used. We have thus been able to detect Eakins's direct use of photographs in paintings from later and much earlier in his career than otherwise assumed. Confirmed use of painting from projection has been found in works as early as 1874 for which no photographs are known: for example, *Sailboats Racing on the Delaware*, the projected figures of which were superimposed on the nearly completed center and far right boats, and *Pushing for Rail*, in which figures were painted over the already well established painting of the marsh setting. Two contemporaneous hunting pictures were seen at the 1875 Paris Salon and noted by the French critic cited above for their remarkable resemblance to tinted photographs. The critic's remark attributing the resemblance to "a still secret industrial process" was, as it turns out, not far from the truth. For the 1879-80 *A May Morning in the Park (The Fairman Rogers Four-in-Hand)*, a variety of preparatory and transfer techniques was used; most notably, the figure group riding on the coach exhibits incised marks and underdrawn datums, indicating its origin in projected photographs.<sup>23</sup> ...

The use of photographs in the 1884–85 *Swimming* has long been a subject of speculation because none of the exact poses in the finished painting is recorded in surviving photographic studies. Directly matching photographs did once exist, however, as the figures exhibit incised marks and pencil-underdrawn datums. The exception is the diver, who shows no signs of projection marks, an absence that supports Susan Eakins’s account that Eakins painted him from a small wax model.<sup>24</sup> Eakins’s desire to conceal signs of his projection process is demonstrated in the swimming figure of the artist himself in the lower right of the painting: one of the incised marks extending into the water to the left of his eyelashes was carefully touched out at a later stage when Eakins deemed it to be too visible.<sup>25</sup> *Swimming* shares with *A May Morning in the Park* the same hybrid process of preparatory work and execution. The landscape setting in *Swimming* was apparently derived, though not necessarily projected, from one of many photographs taken of the site. The figures were projected and painted onto the partly completed landscape. The surface of the water, however, has the same schematic, “constructed” quality as that seen in the 1872 *Pair-Oared Shell*, suggesting that the reflective planes and recession in space of the wavelets may have been analyzed in separate perspective drawings. *Swimming* is the latest painting in Eakins’s career on which we have seen marks indicating painting from projected photographs.<sup>26</sup>

If we consider as a group the paintings that exhibit projection reference marks, a pattern emerges. With a few possible exceptions, the technique has been used only for figures and, moreover, for figures of a small scale, ranging from sixteen inches for the standing figure in *Arcadia* to two-and-a-quarter inches for the central pair in *Pushing for Rail*. The size may have been determined by the need to keep the projector close to the picture—within arm’s reach for Eakins—to facilitate the necessary repeated covering and uncovering of the lens as he worked. Again, our own experience with the use of projected images as an aid to some restorations suggests this real constraint of the method. Where photographs are likely to have been used for larger images . . . , Eakins seems to have preferred traditional “squaring up” to transfer the image, drawing on the canvas from correspondingly squared photographs.<sup>27</sup>

Early in his career, by 1872 and possibly before, Eakins was using photographs in the preparation and execution of his paintings.<sup>28</sup> His general interest in synthesizing processes and images (photographic or not) is shown by the occasional occurrence of more than one technique for the study, layout, and transfer of whole compositions or of individual elements on a single

canvas. Such occurrences also indicate another general inclination of the artist: to isolate problems at the outset and address each by the most apposite means.<sup>29</sup> Given his pragmatism in adopting and adapting imagery from various sources, it is not a straightforward matter to rule out the possibility that a painting was made, in whole or in part, by reference to photography. . . . The situation is complicated by the fact that Eakins seems to have ably combined photographic sources and techniques with more traditional approaches. The strongest indicator that a painting or parts of it did not rely on photographs is the existence of conventional drawn studies, which would have been superfluous if photographs were available. If preparatory drawings were made but do not survive, evidence specific to their transfer (such as pinpricking along contours) or the presence of other lines working out compositional or perspectival construction on the canvas itself argue against the use of source photographs for the specific pictorial elements involved.<sup>30</sup>

Photographs offered extraordinary advantages to painters in the pursuit of high verisimilitude, certainly, but also of new ideas driven by new processes. Such painters faced the fact that their creative use of photography would not be widely understood as rising to new challenges but rather as a way of circumventing conventional ones. An artist's use of raw information from photographs for rigorously analytical and artistically subtle ends is analogous to Eakins's application of anatomy or perspective (neither necessarily "artistic" in itself). The process was conceptually far removed from straightforward mechanical transcription. Eakins exercised specific choices both in making and editing source images. In some cases he omitted or substituted figures that were awkward formally or whose stare into his camera disrupted the sense of the artist's and viewer's passive observation of the scene. In other cases he ambitiously integrated elements from two, three, four, or more source photographs, achieving a unity and plausibility, not to mention lyricism, that eluded most other artists who made the attempt. Raising the challenge to a higher level, Eakins combined photographs and traditional nonphotographic processes to realize strikingly photographic images that had never existed outside the painting. . . .

Eakins's use of photographs in making his paintings was a deeply thoughtful undertaking driven by a personal, if not openly professed, belief in the full artistic validity of the process, and representing, lest there be any doubt, serious work. It is questionable, for example, whether the tedious process of making dozens of microscopic reference marks to paint a figure just a few inches in height was any sort of shortcut at all; it certainly gave a different quality of experience in the assembly, execution, and final appearance of

an image, but probably saved little or no time. If it did not save time or effort, it did allow Eakins to do the job certifiably accurately—to his mind, therefore, perfectly—achieving effects of immediacy, transience, and specificity that made figures emblematic of their time, place, and circumstance. . . .

In marked contrast to Susan Eakins's declaration that Eakins "disliked working from a photograph" for his paintings, present evidence of his creativity and enthusiasm for the processes he employed points to the fact that he reveled in working from, but more importantly with, photographs. As a conveyor of imagery, and as an artist's aid, photographs were the inevitable successor to objectifying devices with a long history in serious painting, such as Claude glasses and cameras obscura and lucida. Such devices helped artists isolate and analyze qualities of visual experience, countering the eyes' too-willing accommodation to distortion or the tendency to overlook telling detail or grand design. Eakins embraced photography as a modern extension of and an effective substitute for traditional means of visual characterization, analysis, and figuration and, as such, a tool that could both shape and serve the values of painting.

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1 Letter to editor, signed "P.D.N.," *The Studio*, vol. 2, no. 44 (November 1883), pp. 197-98.

2 This last possibility would have held special appeal for Eakins, who seems to have regarded drawing as little more than a functional necessity. Kathleen A. Foster has convincingly established that Eakins was not committed to drawing as an independent artistic activity and that the relative scarcity of drawings is because of low production rather than selective survival. See Foster, *Thomas Eakins Rediscovered: Charles Bregler's Thomas Eakins Collection at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press for the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, 1997), pp. 51-71.

3 John M. Tracy, "Recollections of Parisian Art Schools," *The Studio*, vol. 2, no. 27 (July 1883), p. 7.

4 For an extended discussion of the role of photography in naturalist painting, see Gabriel P. Weisberg, *Beyond Impressionism; The Naturalist Impulse* (New York: Abrams, 1992). See also his articles: "P. A. J. Dagnan-Bouveret and The Illusion of Photographic Naturalism," *Arts Magazine*, vol. 56, no. 7 (March 1982), pp. 100-105; and "P. A. J. Dagnan-Bouveret, Jules Bastien-Lepage, and the Naturalist Instinct," *Arts Magazine*, vol. 56, no. 8 (April 1982), pp. 70-76.

5 One observer of the Parisian art scene in the 1860s noted, "Meissonier was quite the pioneer in the use of photography. Many of his pictures were almost entirely done from photographs. The celebrated *Retreat of Napoleon in 1814*, lately owned by Mr. Ruskin and sold for a fabulous price was one of these. The not less famous *Chess Players* is another. Pasini is another example of the skillful use of photography. But I need not give names. Pretty nearly all French painters do the same to a greater or less extent. I remember seeing in a shop window one day in autumn, a very beautiful photograph of a cow. In the following Salon I counted thirteen pictures in which that photograph had been used" (John M. Tracy, "Recollections of Parisian Art Schools," *The Studio*, vol. 2, no. 27 [July 1883], p. 7).

- 6 For example, in his *Lectures on Aesthetics* from the 1820's (first published 1835–38), Georg Friedrich William Hegel wrote: "I will not enter more closely into the confusions which have prevailed respecting the conception of inspiration and genius, and which prevail even at the present day respecting the omnipotence of inspiration as such. We need only lay down as essential the view that, though the artist's talent and genius contains a natural element, yet it is essentially in need of cultivation by thought, and of reflection on the mode in which it produces, as well as of practice and skill in producing" (G. F. W. Hegel, *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*, trans. Bernard Bosanquet [London: Kegan Paul, 1886]; quoted in Charles Harrison, Paul Wood, and Jason Gaiger, eds., *Art in Theory, 1815–1900: An Anthology of Changing Ideas* [Oxford: Blackwell, 1998], p. 63).
- 7 An 1883 letter to *The Studio* indicates the ambivalence among artists and the public regarding the use of photographs: "It is doubtless a surer, and it is certainly a much easier way, to paint from . . . photographs than from nature itself," but "we are not after all as much artists as when we do our own drawing and stand simply in our own thoughts." The writer then proposed "full disclosure" of the use of photographs: "Granted (which we certainly question) that [working from photographs] is the true and best method of work, it should at least be fairly and honestly stated when thus done. Those artists who conscientiously and consistently refrain from such aid should let the fact be understood, since otherwise they place themselves at an immense disadvantage in exhibitions, where their own drawing and modelling is side by side with photographic work, not stated to be such" (Letter to editor, signed "P.D.N.," *The Studio*, vol. 2, no. 44 [November 1883], pp. 197–98).
- 8 Jean-Louis-Ernest Meissonier, who was profoundly interested in the revelations of photography (agreeing, for example, to paint Leland Stanford's portrait only after learning of Stanford's involvement in Eadward Muybridge's motion studies, at which point he "recognized a collaborator!") and who was reputed to rely extensively on photographs for his paintings, is nevertheless quoted as having had only a passing interest in its artistic value: "I hear a great deal of talk about photography. But what would be the pleasure of practicing it? No pursuits are really amusing but those which present great difficulties. Don't you feel that you would lose all interest in an operation if your instrument could work of its own accord?" (quoted in Vallery C. O. Gréard, *Meissonier: His Life and His Art* [London: William Heinemann, 1897], pp. 77, 82).
- 9 See Weisberg 1992, pp. 38–40 for relevant images of Jules-Alexis Muenier; and Weisberg 1982, pp. 100–105.
- 10 Susan Eakins to Alfred R. Mitchell, October 26, 1930, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. (hereafter Archives of American Art).
- 11 "P.D.N." appealed to artists to admit openly their use of photographs: "We do not mean to assert that this use of photographs is made in an underhand or clandestine manner. We believe the fact to be no secret, nor do any of the artists who avail themselves of such aid deny it; the very denial or effort to keep it secret would in itself stamp it as illegitimate" (Letter to editor, signed "P.D.N.," *The Studio*, vol. 2, no. 44 [November 1883], pp. 197–98).
- 12 The secrecy surrounding any serious artist's use of photographs contravened the sharing, much less the standardization and teaching, of specific techniques.
- 13 Previous studies noted various techniques for the transfer of drawings or painted sketches to canvas. Pencil-drawn or incised center and horizontal lines that fix the viewer's point of sight in relation to the limits of the picture plane were a basis of compositional layout advocated by Eakins in his teaching and are frequently found on his canvases, put on as a beginning step (see Eakins's drafts for his drawing manual, c. 1881–87, Thomas Eakins Research Collection, Philadelphia Museum of Art [hereafter Eakins Research Collection]; described in Foster 1997, pp. 59ff., 331 [later published as *A Drawing Manual by Thomas Eakins*, edited with introduction by Kathleen A. Foster and essay by Amy B. Werbel (Philadelphia Museum of Art in ass. with Yale University Press, 2005)—Ed.]). Canvases were sometimes squared off with a grid of pencil lines to facilitate accurate copying of the

- image from a correspondingly squared drawing or painted sketch. See Mark Bockrath, "The Conservation of the Paintings," in Foster 1997, pp. 453–54; and Theodor Siegl, *The Thomas Eakins Collection* (Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1978), p. 89. The transfer of preparatory drawings by placing them over the canvas and pricking through [sic] them to mark contours with closely spaced tiny holes in the priming has been noted in the early 1870s rowing pictures and in the 1879–80 *A May Morning in the Park*; see, respectively, Christina Currie, "Thomas Eakins Under the Microscope," in Helen A. Cooper et al., *Thomas Eakins: The Rowing Pictures* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), pp. 91–96; and Siegl 1978, p. 81. Pinholes also occur singly at the ends or junctions of layout lines. Pencil-drawn or incised arcs and lines delimiting the size or edges of forms indicate that a source image was transferred using dividers and straightedge or that some elements may have been constructed directly on the priming prior to painting; see Currie in Cooper 1996, pp. 91–96, and Currie, "The Biglin Brothers Turning the Stake by Thomas Eakins: A Technical Study Reveals Surprising Techniques," talk delivered at the Annual Meeting of the American Institute for Conservation, Nashville, Tenn., 1994. Incised lengths of intersecting horizontal and vertical lines have been found associated with figures in *Swimming*; see Claire M. Barry, "Swimming by Thomas Eakins: Its Construction, Condition and Restoration," in *Thomas Eakins and the Swimming Picture*, ed. Doreen Bolger and Sarah Cash (Fort Worth, Tex.: Amon Carter Museum, 1996), pp. 100–101.
- 14 See W. Douglass Paschall's essay, "The Camera Artist," in *Thomas Eakins*, organized by Darrel Sewell (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2001), pp. 239–55, 410–15.
  - 15 Our study of underdrawings was carried out with a Hamamatsu C1000-03 infrared vidicon camera, with an N2606 tube. Reflectogram assemblies were made by Joseph Mikuliak using Photoshop 5.0.
  - 16 One tracing method available at the time was the pantograph, a mechanical instrument that allows lines traced on a source image to be duplicated in variable scale on another surface. A few areas of the underdrawings in the Gloucester works were drawn more sketchily and freehand (but clearly in the same tracing session) and do not therefore look consistently mechanical enough to have been transferred with a pantograph. A more traditional tracing method for transfer onto opaque surfaces is a sort of "carbon paper" method, whereby the reverse of a drawing to be traced is blackened with pencil or charcoal. The sheet is then placed on a surface and the lines retraced, transferring the image. The sharp pencil lines seen in the Gloucester underdrawings, however, appear to have been made directly, as was the visible drawing for the *Drawing the Seine* watercolor.
  - 17 The French painter Jules-Alexis Muenier's use of glass lantern slides in the late 1880s to project photographs onto intermediary drawings on paper for subsequent transfer to canvas is discussed in Weisberg 1992, p. 34ff. Weisberg also noted the increasing proliferation, critical acknowledgment, and (in some circles) full validation of painters' direct use of photographs by the end of the century.
  - 18 See Aaron Scharf, *Art and Photography* (London: Penguin, 1968), p. 33.
  - 19 See W. Douglass Paschall's essay "The Camera Artist" for discussion of image-projection devices available at the time. These included not only the common magic lantern for projecting glass slides but also, as Paschall has found, the catoptric lantern for projecting photographic prints. Producing glass photographic positives for the magic lantern was simple and inexpensive; Charles Bregler's Thomas Eakins Collection at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia . . . (hereafter Bregler Collection) includes glass positives from Eakins's photographs, although none of these relate to paintings. Descriptions of the ways artists could use magic lanterns appeared in periodicals devoted to photography. . . .
  - 20 P. A. J. Dagnan-Bouveret, the naturalist painter and a former student with Eakins in Gérôme's studio, had described *Pushing for Rail*, which he had seen in 1875 in Paris, to J. Alden Weir well enough so that when Weir later saw it he said: "The remarkable character of the figures made me realize it was the one he spoke of." Dagnan's special notice of the painting may indicate his recognition, suspicion, or even admiration of Eakins's use of photographs (quoted in Lloyd Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press for the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 1982, vol. 2, p. 271).

- 21 F. de Lagenevais, "Salon de 1875," *Revue des Deux Mondes*, vol. 9, no. 3 (June 15, 1875), p. 927; translated in Ellwood C. Parry III, "Thomas Eakins and the Everpresence of Photography," *Arts Magazine*, vol. 51, no. 10 (June 1977), p. 113.
- 22 Photography's gradual displacement of drawing was not universally regarded as a negative development, but rather, among painters concerned with strict accuracy of representation, as a welcome progression beyond inaccurate conventions of drawing. An account of one artist's experiences in Paris in the late 1860s—"during one of the great transition periods that mark the history of the French School . . . a change from the old to the new, whose importance seems to be imperfectly understood [in the United States]"—reflects such approval: "Little as some like to own it, [the influence of photography on the French School] has been very great; chiefly in the overthrow of conventional classic drawing. The old system of drawing, by which a man's stature must be eight times the length of his head, could not stand beside the absolute verity of the photograph" (J. M. Tracy, "Recollections of Parisian Art Schools," *The Studio*, vol. 2, nos. 27–30 [July 1883], pp. 1, 7).
- 23 See W. Douglass Paschall's essay "The Camera Artist," on the complex preparatory study, transfer, construction, and combination of the painting's various elements.
- 24 "In *The Swimming Hole* Eakins modelled the diving figure in wax and painted from it" (Susan Eakins to Alfred R. Mitchell, October 26, 1930, Archives of American Art).
- 25 Despite the care taken to conceal the small marks made for painting from projected images, Eakins made little effort to hide auxiliary lines, marks, or grids related to more traditional methods of transferring or constructing images.
- 26 *Cowboys in the Bad Lands* of 1888 is another painting for which photographic studies of both figures and landscape survive. During our research it was not possible to examine the painting, though Foster (1997, p. 94) has noted that a transfer grid related to the one on the large Philadelphia study of the standing cowboy and his horse can be seen beneath the paint of the landscape.
- 27 It is less likely, but possible, that Eakins initially projected the photograph onto his canvas to establish the basic contours of the underdrawing and then used squaring only for reference for lay-in of modeling. . . .
- 28 Eakins may have painted from a projected photograph as early as 1872. W. Douglass Paschall has discovered a photographic source for Eakins's painting of his friend Henry Schreiber's setter dog Grouse. The work exhibits some of the tiny incised marks associated with projection as well as squaring drawn before painting and renewed with incised lines in the paint during painting, which suggests Eakins's experimentation with a combined technique at an early point in his career.
- 29 As Eakins wrote in the Spanish notebook, kept at the very beginning of his career as a painter: "All the progress I have made so far has been the result of the discoveries that have permitted me to divide my energies and my work methods. Let us ever divide things up so as to get as strong a start as possible" (Bregler Collection; typescript translation from the original French in Eakins Research Collection).
- 30 Although Christina Currie (in Cooper 1996, pp. 91–96) investigated the use of pinpricking to transfer contours from drawings onto canvas in the rowing pictures, one source mentioned the technique in relation to transfer from photographic prints: "Uses of the Siopticon in Photography," *The Magic Lantern*, vol. 1, no. 9 (1875), p. 76. In some cases, construction of the composition or pictorial space was worked out on the surface of the canvas itself. Red paint and red pencil marks, present along the edges of *Sailboats Racing on the Delaware* and *Between Rounds* suggest end points of auxiliary construction lines. Painted red orthogonals can be detected beneath the paint in *Baby at Play* and *Elizabeth Crowell with a Dog*.

# ***Eakins Revealed: The Secret Life of an American Artist***

HENRY ADAMS, 2005

## **Chapter 11. *Turning the Stake***

Around the time of his mother's death, Eakins's subject matter began to change, perhaps in part because he became free to leave the family home. He ceased to paint his sisters and the Crowells, and family subject matter became less dominant in his work. He gradually began to take on other subjects, such as rowing scenes, medical operations, or artists working from the model. Nonetheless, one still feels a strong sense of autobiography, and of the pull of family relationships, in Eakins's subsequent work. For one thing, when he turned to subjects outside his family he often included himself in the background as a witness or participant in the scene. In addition, many of his later paintings continue to reflect the dynamics of the Eakins family.

Thus, the content of Eakins's paintings often has a double aspect. On the one hand there is the ostensible subject, and these subjects are often quite complex. Eakins often spent considerable time on research, pondering the meaning of every element and carefully studying seemingly insignificant details. Because of his attention to such matters, scholars have devoted enormous attention to anecdotal readings of his paintings. Such efforts, however, while valid in their way, often seem to have little or no connection with the deeper emotional qualities of Eakins's work, and too much attention to them has led to interpretations of Eakins's work that are unconvincing and trivial, such as the view that he was a great painter because he rendered the world accurately and could draw boats in correct perspective. In fact, what might be termed the "surface" subject, often seems to serve as a proxy for a deeper subject with emotions and meanings that have some other source.

In fact, Eakins's work provides a classic instance of the process that Sigmund Freud termed "transference." Eakins imposed the patterns of his family relationships, such as those with his father and mother, on society as a whole. To understand or "decode" Eakins's paintings, I would propose, we need to carry out this process in reverse. In other words, we need to recognize that the key figures in Eakins's paintings take on roles that resemble or recall members of Eakins's family. Thus, for example, the psychological tensions of *The Gross Clinic* make sense when we recognize that the stern, paternal figure

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Henry Adams, *Eakins Revealed: The Secret Life of an American Artist* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005). Excerpts, 193ff. Reprinted by permission of the author and Oxford University Press.



of Dr. Gross serves in some sense as a surrogate for Eakins's father and the cowering, hysterical figure of the patient's mother has qualities that resemble Eakins's own mother. One of the peculiarities of Eakins's paintings is that he often included himself in the role of a bystander, and I take this as a sign that the scenes he recorded had some special personal significance.

Organizing the clues that lead us to one or another reading is often a complicated process, and some delicacy is required in deciding how far to push a particular interpretation. But the central insight, that Eakins transferred family patterns to the world at large, is logical and simple. That he did so to an unusual extent makes sense, since we know that over the course of his life he never fully broke out of the family home. In other words, Eakins's paintings of the later 1870s have many of the same emotional undercurrents, and explore many of the same issues, as the family paintings he created directly after returning from Paris. Seen in this way, Eakins's paintings have some of the qualities of a novel or a play. They are not simply pictorial exercises but stagings or restagings of emotionally significant scenes.

Eakins's rowing pictures form a transitional stage of this process of transferring family issues to the world at large. His first rowing picture, *The Champion Single Sculls* (1871), is fundamentally a self-portrait and a statement about his own ambitions, although somewhat slyly he placed himself in a secondary role, rather than as the main subject. The painting is still about Eakins's "family world," but shows this world and Eakins himself from a slightly different and more distanced standpoint. One of the peculiarities of the painting is that Eakins seems to have expressed his own feelings and ambitions not so much by means of how he showed himself (although he does appear in the painting), as through his representation of his friend Max Schmitt. In other words, while I do not wish to too narrowly limit the meanings of the piece, the painting is at least in part about roles and role playing.

... Schmitt is not shown racing, or as a victor, but in a lonely practice session . . . in a moment of relaxation and contemplation, when he lets his boat drift along on its own, and stares off into empty space. Even the season and time of day convey an elegiac mood and a sense of sadness. The season is autumn, when the leaves are changing color and winter is approaching. The time is late afternoon, when the light is beginning to fade.

... Schmitt serves as a vehicle onto which Eakins projects his own anxieties and needs. Two facts about Eakins's life help explain the painting's solemn mood. One is that Eakins executed the canvas when he was engulfed in a family tragedy, his mother's mental illness, which he desperately wished to escape. The other is that he painted it at a time when he was intensely

eager to become a champion like Schmitt, but had done nothing noteworthy enough to earn such a title.

For many months Eakins had been cooped up in the family home, tending to his mother's nervous ailments. She became distraught whenever he left. Only occasionally, when he was rowing, was he able to move outdoors, to the world of men and masculine pursuits. Seen in this light the painting has many powerful emotional undercurrents: Eakins's desire to escape the constricting family home by going outdoors, to leave his mother's feminine world behind and be a man, to dull the emotional anguish created by his mother's illness through physical exertion. At the deepest level the painting is about depression, both the depression of Eakins's mother and the depression he himself must have felt. At the same time, the painting is about an effort to recover from depression through outdoor activity. . . .

### **Chapter 16. *Swimming***

. . . *Swimming* . . . portrays six naked men, accompanied by a red setter dog, who are diving, pulling themselves from the water, or posing in different positions on a stone pier. Only one man is actually swimming, Eakins himself, which suggests that in some way the painting is about Eakins and his experience. . . . The painting clearly embodies Eakins's feelings about manhood, but very different explanations have been put forward about just what this profusion of male nakedness was meant to signify.

The painting focuses on a loophole in the armor of Victorian propriety and sexual inhibition. We think of Victorians as being more prudish than we are today, but an exception to this notion is the practice of swimming in the nude. . . . In the nineteenth century . . . special attire for sports was a rarity, and for men and boys to swim without a bathing suit was not necessarily shocking or unusual. Even in the city, an utterly public setting, boys and men would unselfconsciously strip off their clothes to swim. . . .

Eakins's painting thus records one of the few occasions on which nudity was displayed in nineteenth-century life. Because no other nineteenth-century American painter focused on this theme, it is reasonable to ask why Eakins chose to do so. Gay men, such as Walt Whitman, took special pleasure in this rare sight of naked male bodies, and Eakins's association with Whitman has encouraged the speculation that they may have shared a homosexual viewpoint.

In addition, however, *Swimming* seems to have a connection with other major paintings by Eakins. *Swimming* takes on a deeper significance when we note its repetition of an element that Eakins had dealt with before:

exposed buttocks. Buttocks are a major point of interest in Eakins's three most ambitious figure compositions: *The Gross Clinic*, *William Rush Carving His Allegorical Figure of the Schuylkill River*, 1876 version, and *Swimming*. In addition, while we conventionally assign a quality of masculinity or femininity to these buttocks, in all three paintings the sex of the naked figure is more than slightly ambiguous. . . .

In *Swimming* . . . a young man's bare buttocks provide the focal point of the composition, around which everything else revolves like the hands on a clock face. How can we explain Eakins's interest in this peculiar subject, or the fact that in all these paintings he seems to have included himself, either as a portrait or, by implication, as an actor in the scene?

In the years since the painting was produced, writers on Eakins have alternated between attempting to downplay the significance of Eakins's extraordinary focus on the nude and proposing that his emphasis on male nudity proves that he was homosexual. . . .

### Eakins and American Queerness

. . . By the 1940s, and perhaps earlier, American homosexuals viewed Eakins as a forebear and role model, although they never came out and used the word "homosexual" in describing his work. Thus for example, the notion that *Swimming* might be homosexual in content was implicit in the long discussion of the picture in *American Renaissance*, published in 1941 by F. O. Matthiessen, himself a homosexual. . . .<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Lincoln Kirstein admired the painting for its homoerotic implications.<sup>2</sup> . . .

The direct suggestion that Eakins might be homosexual finally made its way into print in 1974, when, curiously enough, three separate individuals raised the issue in slightly different contexts. . . .<sup>3</sup> By the 1980s, as gay liberation gained momentum, this tentative suggestion was often magically transformed into a certainty, and Eakins was regularly included in accounts of homosexuality by both gay and straight writers. . . .

Such views represented a complete about-face from early interpretations of Eakins by writers such as Lloyd Goodrich, who viewed the "masculinity" of Eakins as morally superior to the effeminate (homosexual) tendencies of less-masculine American or American expatriate painters such as John La Farge, John Singer Sargent, or James McNeill Whistler. . . .

The divergence of views about Eakins's sexual orientation raises questions about the very discipline of art history as it is now practiced. What is intriguing is that based on exactly the same evidence—a painting of some naked men—some writers have concluded that Eakins was unquestionably

homosexual and others that he could not possibly have been so. In both cases the writers have largely left out the reasons behind their conclusions, and we must conjecture what they must have been. Those arguing that he was homosexual were often homosexual themselves and seized on Eakins as a possible role model; or they may have been accustomed to the modern art world, where the prevalence of homosexuals is a given, and images of nude men generally carry a homosexual subtext. Those arguing against this conclusion have had more varied motives. Goodrich argues not very convincingly that homosexuality is fundamentally feminine and effeminate and therefore that Eakins's glorification of aggressively male qualities could not be homosexual. Foster glorifies Eakins's relationship with his wife and is thus unwilling to acknowledge the possibility of homosexual relationships which would undercut this glorious partnership. Homer seems to insist on firm documentation, of an incontrovertible sort, although surely the lack of such documentation does not say much, since in the nineteenth century homosexuality was an issue that was seldom openly discussed.

A final judgment on the matter is complicated by the fact that we know surprisingly little about the practice of homosexuality in nineteenth-century America, although it is clear that male friendship was viewed differently than today. Photographs of young men holding hands, for example, were viewed as natural expressions of friendship, whereas today they would carry homosexual implications. More profoundly, however, Eakins's imagery seems to move into a zone that is highly ambiguous, since he made no statements about it and there is no other nineteenth-century American painting of this subject. In this regard it is useful to remember that his behavior toward women and his interest in undressing them was also puzzling to his contemporaries, some seeing it as sexually motivated and others denying this altogether.

This raises the question of whether Eakins could have been both homosexual and not homosexual at the same time. In other words, his painting seems to challenge the usual boundaries between the heterosexual, the homosocial, the homoerotic, and the homosexual. According to this view, we might suppose that Eakins's sexual identity was unstable, and open to reconstitution and revision. Whitney Davis, for example, has worked his way around the question of the artist's orientation by ingeniously proposing that Eakins was "not not homosexual."<sup>4</sup> Such a view opens up still another set of questions. Defenders of Eakins, such as Kathleen Foster, have presented his sexual ideas as liberated. But Davis's verbal gyrations raise the possibility that he was tied in emotional knots and may well have been sexually repressed. In

short, perhaps what is interesting about Eakins's painting may well be its element of sexual confusion.

### **Naked Men Together**

Both those who see Eakins as homosexual and those who do not draw almost all of their arguments from *Swimming* and the photographs related to it. But the clues that the paintings and photographs provide are strangely contradictory.

Significantly, there was no precedent in nineteenth-century American art for such a profusion of naked male figures. Representations of nude or nearly nude female figures did exist, but they seem to have been a low-class form, which existed as a type of popular art, but was not practiced by serious American painters. . . . Anecdotal evidence suggests that this sort of painting often decorated saloons. Thus, Eakins was taking a low-class form and transforming it into a major statement, as well as taking a profusion of nudity considered appropriate only for risqué renderings of women, and applying it to men.<sup>5</sup>

. . . Randall Griffin . . . has noted that Eakins's painting sets "an obvious challenge to the late-nineteenth-century dominance of the female figure among nudes." Perceptively, he proposes that the painting "was Eakins's assertion . . . of the superiority of man as both principal maker of art and its ideal model."<sup>6</sup> . . .

The paradox of Eakins's painting, however is that in seeking to assert the superiority of men over women, it actually undermines manhood by creating a situation in which women are completely absent and therefore men must play the female roles. He also does not seem to have grasped that most men are supposed to respond to male and female nudes in a different fashion; they are supposed to be sexually attracted to the beauty of female nudes but not men. In fact, he created this profusion of male nudity approximately a year after he married Susan Macdowell, at the point in their marriage when most sexually potent nineteenth-century couples were beginning to have children.<sup>7</sup>

. . . Eakins made it clear that he considered men superior to women, and of course if this were true in all respects, then surely a naked man would be superior to a naked woman. In asserting this superiority of the naked man, however, Eakins went against a powerful social norm, for men are supposed to admire the opposite sex—"the fair sex," to use a Victorian locution. One possible explanation is that Eakins flouted this code because he was homosexual—whether consciously or unconsciously, openly or covertly. But

another explanation is also possible—namely that he felt that the sexual connotations of the female nude were inherently bad, sinful, or embarrassing, and thus he preferred the male nude, where the connotations were less powerful.

The most puzzling aspect of *Swimming* is that Eakins presented such a profusion of naked male figures. What should be made of this fact? The multiplication of the figures sends an ambiguous message, for it both heightens the eroticism of the painting and effectively neutralizes it. Multiplication is a common theme of pornographic memoirs, such as those of Casanova, whose favorite fantasy seems to have been to spend the night cavorting with two or more nearly identical women, often sisters. . . . For Eakins, multiplication may have had a similar significance. . . .

If there were just two nude figures in Eakins's painting, we might suppose that some sort of intimacy or coy sexual exploration would develop. But with six that possibility is considerably minimized. . . . Thus, in a paradoxical way, Eakins's multiplication of the nude figures is both erotic and antierotic. Like so much of Eakins's behavior, the painting seems to tease the viewer with possibilities of erotic or pornographic fulfillment, while at the same time effectively neutralizing the possibility that anything sexual will actually occur. . . .

Despite the title, Eakins and his dog are the only figures that are actually swimming. Eakins's position is a privileged one, since he plays the role of voyeur. His placement also suggests that he was the one who orchestrated the composition.

Indeed, a theme that earlier writers have not discussed, but which seems implicit in the painting, is the possibility that one of the young men might reveal some sort of sexual excitement (that is, an erection), and thus embarrass himself before the others. Significantly, the fact that the men are all concealing their genitals, not only indicates that they have something to conceal, and also leaves their state of arousal ambiguous, which is perhaps more provocative than resolving the question. (As early as 1967, Sylvan Schendler noted, "despite his absolute mastery of the human figure, Eakins could not permit himself to paint a male figure with his genitals showing.")<sup>8</sup>

While Eakins showed himself naked, the lower part of his body remains concealed under the water. Thus, he is in a position of power, in which he can flaunt his manhood but remain hidden, and in which he can look at the others but they cannot look at him. Viewers of the painting are encouraged to imagine him as sexually potent and in a dominant role, whether or not he actually was so.

. . .

## Exhibitionism

. . . To underscore the fact that the painting showed specific people, not just anonymous models, Eakins showed clothed portraits of two of the figures, [Talcott] Wallace and [George] Reynolds, alongside *Swimming*, when he first exhibited it at the Academy.

It is this element of “real life,” not the mere fact that it shows naked people, that makes *Swimming* most intensely provocative. . . .

In addition to its element of sexual innuendo, the nudity in *Swimming* may have shocked [Edward H.] Coates in another way. Eakins’s letters from Paris tell us that he felt considerable resentment toward upper-class people, particularly if they acted the part of “swells.” In nineteenth-century terms, the issue of nudity touched on the issue of social class in a way that was loaded with powerful meanings. On the one hand, working-class people, who engaged in physical labor, often stripped off their shirts when working outdoors, particularly in hot weather. When they wanted to cool off, they might even strip off their clothes entirely to swim. Upper-class people or supervisors, on the other hand, avoided physical activity of this sort, and even in hot weather were expected to maintain their ties, jackets, and hats, as signifiers of their superior social position.

Eakins’s portrayal of naked young men thus represented a challenge to upper-class standards of behavior. It presented behavior associated with the working class as a kind of ideal, and as implicitly superior to upper-class standards. To lend credibility to this challenge, moreover, Eakins seems to have invoked the sanction of the classical antique. Indeed, the stiffness of his composition, although visually awkward, appears to have been deliberate, and a conscious invocation of the pediments of classical temples. . . . In short, Eakins’s focus on the nude was a conscious affront to the sensibility of socially proper upper-class people such as Coates—the very gentleman who had instigated the commission.

When Eakins first exhibited *Swimming* at the Pennsylvania Academy, the press was ostentatiously silent about its expressive qualities, particularly given its unusual subject and the prominence of Eakins in the Philadelphia art world. . . . In short, the painting seems to have been received with the mysterious, embarrassed silence that so often surrounds the subject of sex. Interestingly, an anonymous reviewer for *The Philadelphia Inquirer* noted that the painting was bound to “excite abundant criticism, both friendly and unfriendly.”<sup>9</sup> What this criticism might be, the journalists did not wish to commit to print.

In fact, Eakins seems to have been interested in creating embarrassment at many levels. Surely it was embarrassing for his students to have their nakedness on public view. Surely it was also embarrassing to his cautious patron to have his name associated with such a provocative image. Surely also, the shock that Eakins created with this picture was similar to the disruption he caused by asking people to undress for him, or by disrobing himself. As with Eakins's personal behavior, the affront was difficult to discuss. It does not surprise us that Coates was silent about what Eakins had done, or that journalists had little to say about the painting, for to admit that an affront had occurred required discussing unmentionable subjects, and violating accepted patterns of behavior. As with rape, the shame of the action became attached not only to the perpetrator, but to the victim.

...

... The meaning of *Swimming* may not be entirely contained within the painting itself. Eakins's pleasure in creating it, for example, was evidently spurred by the thought of embarrassing his patron, Edward Horner Coates. Thus, the "narrative" of the painting extends out into the social sphere, and the best clues to its meaning may lie not within the canvas but in other aspects of Eakins's behavior. ...

### **Chapter 19. *Love of Looking***

... Exhibitionists who expose themselves at home or in other nonpublic places may shock people, and stir up scandal and commentary, but generally avoid arrest. Eakins provides an instance of this game of crossing over social boundaries, but not too far, since he generally exposed himself either at home or in places where there was some kind of excuse for doing so, such as the shore (nude swimming) or in a artist's studio (nude posing). ...

Goodrich has suggested that Eakins's difficulties in working with the nude created an obsession that became more exaggerated as he grew older—a view that has been echoed by Kathleen Foster.<sup>10</sup> But the many accounts of Eakins's exhibitionist behavior as an old man surely indicate that he behaved in this fashion as a young man as well. Typically, exhibitionism tends to grow less intense with age.

...

As yet no unified theory has been developed that explains all aspects of exhibitionism, but significant advances have been made on several fronts.<sup>11</sup> ...



## Four Approaches to Exhibitionism

... W[e come up with] four different explanatory approaches, although to some extent these forms of explanation interlock. One is the simple idea that disorders often mimic or mirror some form of trauma. ... In the case of Eakins this simple principle allows us to work backwards, from symptom to cause. For example, we can conjecture that if Eakins exposed himself to other people, then at some point someone probably exposed himself to him—or did something that was emotionally equivalent to exposure.

The obvious problem with this approach is that we cannot assume that the stimulus and the disorder it caused are identical. While the disorder may have mirrored the stimulus, it did so imperfectly, and therefore, while the disorder provides clues about the cause, it does not replicate the cause exactly. ...

The second mode of explanation is Freudian psychology. Essentially, Freud deduced a set of internal psychological mechanisms by which one impulse is converted to another—a sort of emotional algebra. Thus, for example, Freud proposed that a small boy will translate anxiety about punishment from his father into a fear of castration. Under extreme circumstances, he then develops various forms of unusual behavior that reflect this fear of castration, including exhibitionism. ...

In many respects, Freud's theories are simply an elaboration of the concept of mimicking or mirroring a form of trauma. These theories, however, provide some understanding of the inner mechanisms of this process, and the way that one form of stimulus may be translated into a slightly different pattern of behavior. ... Eakins's behavior often falls into place according to Freudian theory, in textbook fashion.

The third approach is simply an extension of the second: Power Dynamics. Freud often seemed to set primary emphasis on issues of sexual pleasure (although his definition of sexual gratification was extremely broad). Very often, however, the behavior of exhibitionists seems to focus not so much on sexual pleasure as on a sense of power that is achieved through such weapons as humiliation and embarrassment. Since exhibitionism (and voyeurism) clearly focuses on things that are charged with sexual implications, a description of exhibitionism based on issues of power often overlaps significantly with a Freudian approach. Nonetheless, focusing on power rather than sex allows us to see exhibitionism in a slightly different light, and to weigh its components a little differently.

Finally, exhibitionism has been traced to biochemical factors, which presumably have a genetic basis. ... Notably, on the whole such a biochemical

approach does not so much contradict Freudian theories as reinforce and supplement them. . . .

In my analysis of Eakins, I will interweave and draw on all four of these approaches. . . .

### **Freudian Theories**

. . . In Eakins's case, this means that the form of his aberrant behavior probably to some degree mimicked or mirrored things that were traumatic in his childhood. As a consequence, by studying Eakins's symptoms, to some degree we can deduce their cause. As a starting point we have two powerful clues: first, that exhibitionism often seems to be triggered by something troubled about a boy's relationship to his parents (whether father or mother); and second, that Eakins's mother was psychologically disturbed. In short, Eakins's family background fits with what we would expect to cause him to become an exhibitionist. The question then becomes, in what specific ways was Eakins's relationship with his mother traumatic and precisely how did his later behavior mirror or reflect these traumas? To answer these questions, at least in a tentative way, we need to review what we know of Eakins's relationship to his mother and of the nature of her illness.

### **Eakins's Mother**

To a degree that seems almost willfully perverse, writers on Eakins have always discounted the bipolar illness of Eakins's mother, Caroline. When he wrote his first book on Eakins in the 1930s, Goodrich must have known that Eakins's mother suffered from mental illness, but he did not mention it, and the subject did not enter the literature on Eakins for another fifty years, when Goodrich devoted a paragraph to the matter in his two-volume study of the artist.<sup>12</sup> Neither Goodrich nor Hendricks, however, felt that the fact was particularly significant, and they both saw it as an isolated matter, without larger ramifications. Michael Fried is the only writer who has suggested that the illness of his mother had any psychological impact on Eakins, but his speculations on the matter have been quite limited. He simply proposed that the hysterical actions of the mother figure in *The Gross Clinic* may well have been inspired by the hysterical behavior of the artist's own mother.<sup>13</sup>

Both Hendricks and Goodrich seem to have supposed that the illness of Eakins's mother was a relatively brief episode. This seems highly unlikely. Manic-depression is generally a lifelong condition. The symptoms generally surface early in life (the average age of onset is eighteen) and then grow in intensity.<sup>14</sup> We can be virtually certain that Eakins's mother suffered

from intermittent episodes of mania or depression and that her illness was one of the central experiences of her son's childhood. . . .

Significantly, neither Eakins nor any other member of his family ever left any verbal or written record of his mother's illness. We know about it only from her death certificate and the comments of neighbors. Most likely the matter was not even discussed within the family. A father who did not allow his family to speak at mealtimes was not the sort of parent to whom a boy could spill his troubles. From the psychological standpoint, however, this powerful element of repression probably made the experience even more devastating. Eakins's letters do contain frequent references to family secrets.

. . .

We know that Eakins served as his mother's principal nurse during her final illness. Her intense distress when he left her even briefly suggests that she formed a closer emotional bond with him than with her husband. Most likely, Eakins took on these nursing responsibilities very early in life, since his father was preoccupied with business and writing activities, and thus would naturally have delegated care of his wife to his oldest son. Possibly Caroline's final emotional decline was even triggered in part by Eakins's separation from her when he was studying painting in Paris. Whatever the exact arrangement, it is clear that throughout his childhood Eakins must have spent long hours with his mother when she was in an emotionally troubled state.

This responsibility suggests a reason for one of the singularities of Eakins's art—his extraordinary preoccupation with doctors. If Eakins's mother was ill, surely doctors were consulted, and early in childhood Eakins seems to have developed the fantasy of becoming a powerful male figure, like a doctor, who could heal his mother's illness.

We have no verbal description of Caroline Eakins's behavior, but in his portraits of other women, Eakins seems to have explored the symptoms he had observed in his mother. As has been noted, the women Eakins painted invariably look distraught, whether or not they were so in real life. Indeed, his treatment of them when posing seems to have been calculated to bring out qualities of unhappiness and annoyance. What is more, Eakins's portraits of women often seem to bring out different aspects of manic-depressive illness. . . .

Given her illness, and its typical manifestations, it is likely that Eakins's mother sometimes engaged in behavior that was disturbingly sexual, such as undressing, confiding intimate sexual matters, or even attempting to seduce him. Of these activities, the one that seems most directly mirrored in Eakins's paintings and personal behavior is that of

disrobing. The act of being unclothed (or dressing improperly) plays a large role in Eakins's paintings. . . .

Voyeurism also interested Eakins. It is tempting to suppose that Eakins's voyeuristic behavior mirrored in some way the actions of his mentally unbalanced mother. For example, if Eakins's mother embarrassed him by undressing during her fits of mania, he could invert this situation by forcing other women to undress, and embarrassing them.

Many of Eakins's paintings—notably his medical and boxing scenes, but other paintings as well—feature an audience of onlookers. One explanation for this preoccupation would be that looking at his naked mother caused Eakins emotional distress. Thus, the act of looking held particular importance for him. . . .

Thus, Eakins's family situation was both privileged and abused. As the eldest child he was naturally favored, and since he was male he was allowed to rule over his mother and sisters. In his role as a surrogate father, however, Eakins was handed a responsibility that would be traumatic to any child, that of caring for an emotionally unstable person. Indeed, throughout his childhood, Eakins appears to have taken on a partnership with his mother that was quite similar to that of a husband, a role with incestuous implications.

As psychiatrists like R. D. Laing have observed, to an extraordinary degree human beings develop their self-image from the way they are reflected back in the behavior of the people around them.<sup>15</sup> Tragically, Eakins's mirror was as bent and twisted as a fun-house mirror. When he looked into his own psyche he was confronted with the image of his mother's depression and moments of psychosis. Both Eakins's failure to control or cure his mother, and the embarrassingly sexual nature of her behavior, must have undercut his sense of masculine identity at the same time that it implanted a deep-rooted hostility toward women. . . .

In addition, not having a penis—being a woman—was evidently connected in Eakins's mind with the bizarre behavior of his mother. Nineteenth-century medical literature strongly associated strange emotional outbursts with female qualities, and was a powerful undercurrent in the writings of doctors whom Eakins knew, such as D. Hayes Agnew and Horatio Wood, who associated diseases ranging from cancer to mental illness with the alleged weaknesses of female anatomy. No doubt Eakins's father also explained his mother's outbursts as a natural consequence of the fact that she was female. . . .

Eakins's association between manic-depression and female qualities surely relates to his hostility toward anything feminine, and his belief that women were both mentally and physically inferior to men. While all these views were imbedded in nineteenth-century thinking, they were generally counterbalanced by other idealizing and romantic attitudes. Eakins's constant insistence that women were inferior to men, and should remain subordinate to them, seems misogynist even by nineteenth-century standards.

Finally, Eakins's anxiety about castration had still another source. As a caregiver for his mother—very likely, the primary caregiver—he was thrown into a relationship that was intimate and marriage-like. This triggered the fear of incest, which then expressed itself as a sense of emasculation and a fear of castration.

...

### Depression in the Eakins Family

Bipolar illness has a strong genetic component. Children of bipolar parents are often bipolar or suffer from closely related mood disorders, such as depression. Thus it is logical to ask whether Caroline Eakins's illness descended to any of her children. In the case of Thomas the answer is clearly yes. In photographs taken throughout his lifetime, Eakins looks troubled or depressed; his odd behavior (he often seemed listless or withdrawn) fits with a diagnosis of depression; and we know that he sought medical guidance from S. Weir Mitchell and others on coping with depression. Oddly, this issue has never been discussed by any of Eakins's biographers, but it has not been missed by doctors: Kay Redfield Jamison's classic study of bipolar disorder, *Touched with Fire*, lists Eakins as a figure who probably suffered from this condition.<sup>16</sup> Recognizing this likelihood places both Eakins's life and art in a different light. It suggests that throughout his life, Eakins was troubled by the possibility that he would descend into his mother's insanity. Thus, the extraordinary emphasis on depressed people in his paintings had a personal significance for him. Through these works he was both exploring his mother's death and an illness with which he was also afflicted.<sup>17</sup>

Two other members of the family, Margaret and Frances, also appear to have suffered from depression, although so far as we know, they did not experience full-scale bipolar illness. Our chief source of information on this matter, admittedly a somewhat subjective form of evidence, is family photographs. In existing photographs, Margaret looks unhappy, and Frances looks fretful and sour. The accounts of Eakins's relationship with Frances also

suggest that she was deeply unhappy. Frances's daughter, Ella, was probably bipolar like her grandmother, as is suggested both by her suicide and by numerous accounts indicating that she was unhappy, insecure and temperamental.

...

Two things are significant here. On the negative side, if several members of the family were bipolar, it must have given disputes within the family a particularly volatile quality since the causes of unhappiness and anger within the family were often not logical or reasonable. This situation in turn must have encouraged members of the family to become stubborn and intransigent, a pattern that they then transferred to relationships outside the family.<sup>18</sup> Eakins's tendency to become involved in feuds and disputes, and to be unreasonable in dealing with them, appears to have been based on patterns he learned from his family.

On the positive side, manic-depression is often associated with artists and highly creative individuals. As Jamison notes, "recent research strongly suggests that, compared with the general population, writers and artists show a vastly disproportionate rate of manic-depressive or depressive illness."<sup>19</sup> In many instances, this disease can also be traced in their ancestors and relatives. Thus, for example, the families of figures such as Byron, Tennyson, Melville, William and Henry James, Schumann, Coleridge, Van Gogh, Hemingway, and Virginia Woolf all show a high rate of manic-depression that runs through generations. As Jamison notes, "Manic-depressive illness, then, is a very strange disease—one that confers advantage, but often kills or destroys as it does so."<sup>20</sup>

...

In Eakins's case, it is possible that bipolar disorder was associated with obsessive compulsive behavior, which is sometimes linked with manic-depression. As the name suggests, this term refers to a compulsive need to carry out repetitive tasks. In its extreme form it can lead to obsessive rituals of washing, organizing objects, checking locked doors, or similar activities, which are repetitively carried out for hours, and often so paralyze the individuals afflicted that they cannot function effectively. It is often associated with deeper feelings of psychological anxiety, and seems to function as a means of regaining emotional control. Eakins's behavior does not precisely fit the clinical description of obsessive-compulsive syndrome, since his compulsiveness was not so exaggerated, but it does seem to fit with a less extreme form of this general pattern, Obsessive-Compulsive Personality Disorder, which is listed in the DSM as a Cluster C personality disorder.

Eakins's fascination with the calculations of perspective may well fall into this category, as well as the elaborate productions he went through with his sitters, such as pinning ribbons to them and aligning these markers with a gridded background.

While writers have marveled about Eakins's brilliance in handling perspective, his methods were relatively simple, and surprisingly unvaried, but so repetitive that few artists were willing to undertake them. In short, what was unusual about Eakins was his willingness to compulsively carry out a highly repetitive task: to calculate curves that ran through hundreds of little boxes, and that required many hours of tedious work. Significantly, Eakins's interest in perspective first became evident at a time of great emotional anxiety: his first paintings of this type, his rowing paintings, were produced at the time of his mother's final illness. Later, he seems to have turned to perspective at times of particular stress, for example producing one of his most intricately plotted paintings, his portrait of Henry Rowland, shortly after the suicide of Ella Crowell.

### **The Chemistry of Depression**

While Eakins's behavior falls very neatly into a psychoanalytic model, other forms of explanation also provide useful insights.<sup>21</sup> In recent years, psychotherapy has been profoundly influenced by the development of chemical treatments for depression. . . .

The relevance of this to Eakins is that most of the peculiarities of his personality—depression, obsessiveness, sensitivity to rejection, exhibitionism, and so forth—are disorders that have been successively treated with SSRIs [selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors, such as Prozac], at least in some cases. While they were previously viewed as disconnected, it now appears likely that these syndromes bear a biochemical relationship to each other. Since Eakins is dead, we cannot put this theory to the test by giving him SSRIs and seeing if they alter his behavior and mental condition. But it seems quite possible that Eakins suffered from a deficit of serotonin neuromodulation and that many of the difficulties of his life were related to this fact.

Modern theory, in short, offers us two distinctly different models for describing Eakins's behavior, one based on Freudian theory, the other on biochemistry. . . .

### **Nineteenth-Century Treatments for Depression**

During Eakins's lifetime, depression and related mental illnesses were poorly understood, but doctors were making first attempts both to describe and to

treat these diseases. Several of Eakins's biographers have noted that he had a nervous breakdown of some sort after he was fired from the Pennsylvania Academy and that he sought treatment for his illness from the nationally known specialist on nervous diseases, S. Weir Mitchell. Eakins's excursion to the Dakotas was a "camp cure" that precisely followed Mitchell's directions. Writers have not noted, however, that Eakins also seems to have followed Mitchell's advice about diet and medication for nervous illness and depression.

Along with advocating rest and camp cures, Mitchell experimented with curing "nervousness" through diet. He wrote an entire book, *Fat and Blood*, outlining his ideas on this subject. His theory was that the fatigue and lethargy associated with the disorder was because of something wrong with the patient's blood, which consequently was not nourishing the brain in proper fashion. Specifically, he believed that the illness was associated with a loss of fat. Consequently, he believed that a diet high in fat would serve "to fatten and redden" the sufferer and lead to a cure. To achieve this end, he advised consuming quantities of milk. His treatment ordinarily began with a diet consisting entirely or nearly entirely of milk, and even when he added other food, he continued to press his patients to consume two quarts or more of milk on a daily basis.<sup>22</sup>

. . . Eakins's consumption of milk was surely due to Mitchell's regimen.

One might even postulate that the large quantities of milk Eakins consumed can be taken as an indicator of the degree of his anxiety about his susceptibility to his mother's illness. In other words, attempting to cure himself may have become a compulsive act. Significantly, however, he does not seem to have confided his motives for drinking milk to anyone. Samuel Murray, his closest intimate, knew that he drank huge quantities of milk but did not know why. Eakins seems to have done his best to conceal his psychological anxieties even from those seemingly most intimate to him. But that Eakins consumed milk in such an extraordinary fashion suggests that he was secretly afraid that he suffered from his mother's illness and might lose his mind or die from it. The extent of his consumption may be taken as an indicator of the level of his anxiety.

. . .

Along with milk, one may ask whether Eakins took other medications. In the nineteenth century drugs such as cocaine, morphine, and laudanum were often given out to treat depression. Mitchell's writings indicate that he prescribed opium, morphine, and cannabis.<sup>23</sup> Harrison Morris



and others who knew Eakins in the 1890s mentioned that he had a sagging lip and that he slobbered when he painted.<sup>24</sup> This may indicate that he was taking a narcotic in oral form and that it numbed his lip. Descriptions of Eakins strongly suggest that he may have been taking some form of narcotics. His glazed eyes, his slow speech, his shuffling gait, and even some of his strange behavior, such as his pattern of waddling after women at parties and staring at them intently, all fit with this supposition. In short, Eakins's peculiar behavior, while very likely largely due to depression and other biochemical imbalances, may well have been exacerbated by narcotic substances.

## Chapter 20. *Subversive Themes*

The realization that Eakins was an exhibitionist-voyeur and that his behavior was somehow connected to his mother's illness not only explains much of the behavior that so puzzled his contemporaries, but also elucidates the meanings of his work, and brings out undercurrents of meaning that tie together seemingly disparate subjects. Sadly, the tendency of writers on Eakins to rush to his defense has led them to ignore clues that are lying out in plain sight. . . . In fact, the loin cloth incident, which has always stood at the center of the mythology that has developed around Eakins, in very striking fashion dramatizes the central features of Eakins's psychological disorder.

Eakins's paintings tend to deal with a few themes, to which he returned with continual variations. The most obvious is depression, an issue surely important to him because of his mother's illness, and quite likely also significant because he suffered from depression himself.

Eakins's preoccupation with individuals who appear depressed brings to mind a common phenomenon associated with the relatives and associates of manic-depressive individuals—hypervigilance. Bipolar individuals are normal most of the time, but can suddenly slip into extreme or bizarre forms of behavior. . . .

In addition to depression, Eakins was fascinated with undressing, as well as with wounding or penetration. Disrobing is the central theme of *William Rush* and *The Swimming Hole*, wounding or penetration that of *The Gross Clinic* and *The Agnew Clinic*. In exploring these ideas, Eakins shifted back and forth between a male and female viewpoint. Thus, *William Rush* examines the female nude, *The Swimming Hole* the male nude; *The Gross Clinic* records the cutting of a male patient, *The Agnew Clinic* the carving of a female one. While these issues of undressing and of wounding or penetrating sometimes push in opposite directions, they also often overlap. Thus, *The*

*Gross Clinic* is not only a painting about cutting but about exposing the buttocks of the patient. At a less obvious level, a painting such as *The Swimming Hole* is not simply a painting about undressing, but about penetration, since it plays with the issue of homosexual desire.

...

In short, the powerful and disturbing qualities of Eakins's paintings are to a large degree due to the fact that he combined three issues, which he saw as very similar to one another, if not quite identical—whether one was genitally intact or castrated, whether one was male or female, and whether one was sane and authoritative, or insane and hysterical. . . .

The element of trauma in Eakins's childhood may explain not only the subject matter of his most successful paintings, but the fundamental peculiarities of his artistic technique. One might propose that the basic duality of the carefully ruled, rational perspective grid and the impulsive, unpredictable overlay of pigment in Eakins's work reflects a slightly uncomfortable synthesis of the personalities of his two parents: his father the calligrapher, rigid, correct, and orderly; and his mother the manic-depressive, either lethargic or hysterically out of control. While Eakins's perspective grid evokes the carefully ruled lines of the calligrapher, extended from two to three dimensions, his loosely applied colors, with their careless splotches and drips, suggest his mother's emotional fluctuations.

Eakins's use of perspective is marked by an exceptional rigidity and lack of imagination, in keeping with what we know of his rigid and inflexible father. His use of color, however, evokes a great emotional range, from drabness and dullness to violence, anger, or hysteria. Eakins's favorite color choices—dull, dark brown, and, in contrast, shrieking pinks—seem to reflect his mother's emotional swings from apathetic torpor to shrieking hysteria. Thus, both the imagery of Eakins's paintings, and his fundamental technique, with its curious mixture of control and disorder, may well contain a deeply embedded symbolic system, integrally bound up with his family history.

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1 F. O. Matthiessen, *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1941), pp. 604–610. Elizabeth Johns, "Swimming: Thomas Eakins, *The Twenty-ninth Swimmer*," in Doreen Bolger and Sarah Cash, eds., *Thomas Eakins and the Swimming Picture* (Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth, 1996), pp. 66–79, draws many of the same parallels between Eakins and Whitman although without crediting Matthiessen's account.

2 Lincoln Kirstein, "Aid and Comfort to Eakins," *The Nation*, May 15, 1972, p. 632.

- 3 Gordon Hendricks, *The Life and Work of Thomas Eakins* (New York: Grossman, 1974), p. 160, 221; see also Kathleen A. Foster and Cheryl Leibold, *Writing About Eakins: The Manuscripts in Charles Bregler's Thomas Eakins Collection* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989), p. 115; . . . Donelson F. Hoopes, *American Narrative Painting* (Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1974), p. 163; . . . William H. Gerdts, *The Great American Nude* (New York: Praeger, 1974), pp. 122-123.
- 4 Whitney Davis, "Erotic Revision in Thomas Eakins's Narratives of Male Nudity," *Art History* (September 1994): 301. I am somewhat simplifying Davis's more complex formulation of this idea.
- 5 See Bruce Weber, *American Paintings XI* (New York: Berry-Hill Galleries, 2004), pp. 64-66; Gerdts, 1974, p. 73.
- 6 Randall C. Griffin, "Thomas Eakins' Construction of the Male Body, or 'Men get to know each other across the space of time,'" *Oxford Art Journal* 18, no. 2 (1995), p. 70.
- 7 Because of birth control, and for cultural reasons, many modern married couples wait several years to have children, but in the nineteenth century it was most common to begin having children within a year or so of marriage, as was the case with Eakins's two sisters and his father.
- 8 Sylvan Schendler, *Eakins* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1967), p. 86.
- 9 Bolger, 1996, p. 123.
- 10 Lloyd Goodrich, *Thomas Eakins* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press for National Gallery of Art, 1982), vol. 2, p. 95; Foster, 1989, pp. 121-122, writes of Eakins, "Perhaps he felt liberated by age to do exactly as he pleased."
- 11 I do not claim that my summary is absolutely comprehensive, although it seems to me that most additional approaches can be encompassed within these schemas. A concept which has proved valuable for therapy is that of "courtship disorders"—the notion that an individual may become "fixated" on one stage of normal courtship. This theory has obvious value in therapy, since it focuses the patient toward "normal" forms of sexual fulfillment and makes it easier to discuss paraphilias. The approach has been eloquently developed by John Money, [*Lovemaps: Clinical Concepts of Sexual Erotic Health and Pathology, Paraphilia and Gender Transposition in Childhood, Adolescence and Maturity*, (Irvington, NY: Ardent Media)], 1986.
- 12 Goodrich, 1982, vol. I, pp. 76, 79.
- 13 Michael Fried, *Realism, Writing, Disfiguration: On Thomas Eakins and Stephen Crane* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 41, 69.
- 14 Kay Redfield Jamison, *Touched with Fire: Manic-Depressive Illness and the Artistic Temperament* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993), pp. 16-17.
- 15 R. D. Laing, *The Divided Self: An Existential Study in Society and Madness* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1965).
- 16 Jamison, 1993, pp. 236, 269.
- 17 Eakins's self portraits seem to dramatize his depressed state. As Tom Lutz has observed, "Eakins turns a morbid eye upon himself and exaggerates his own debility." See Lutz, *American Nervousness, 1903: An Anecdotal History* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 283.

- 18** See Margaret McHenry, *Thomas Eakins Who Painted* (Oreland, Pennsylvania: Privately printed, 1946), p. 94.
- 19** Jamison, 1993, p. 5.
- 20** Jamison, 1993, p. 240.
- 21** My discussion of serotonin and SSRIs is largely based on Peter D. Kramer, *Listening to Prozac* (New York: Penguin, 1997), particularly chapter 3. My thanks also to Suzanne DeBrosse, a medical student at Case Western Reserve, who coached me about this material and reviewed what I wrote. I have benefited from discussions with two pioneer researchers into the properties of serotonin, Pedro Delgado, head of psychiatry at University Hospital in Cleveland, and Evan Deneris, professor of neurosciences at the Medical School at Case Western Reserve. Both kindly looked over a preliminary draft of this section and made corrections.
- 22** S. Weir Mitchell, *Fat and Blood, and How to Make Them* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1879), pp. 54, 76, 77. On page 91 he specifically mentions prescribing "two quarts of milk" to a male patient. See also S. Weir Mitchell, *Lectures on Diseases of the Nervous System, Especially in Women* (Philadelphia: Lea Brothers & Co., 1885), p. 280.
- 23** S. Weir Mitchell, "Clinical Nervousness in the Male," *The Medical News and Library* 35 (December 1877), p. 183; Mitchell, 1879, pp. 19 and 77. In this period, cocaine was readily available, both as a medicine and as a mood enhancer. Freud experimented with cocaine, as did William James (and also the fictional character Sherlock Holmes). For a time cocaine was even an ingredient in the popular beverage, Coca-Cola. My thanks to Dr. Lewis Obi, who suggested to me that Eakins may have been dependent on narcotics in an e-mail of January 19, 2003.
- 24** Hendricks, 1974, p. 220.

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Thomas Eakins's last sporting painting, the grand *Wrestlers*, 1899, inspired both this anthology and the related exhibition *Manly Pursuits: The Sporting Images of Thomas Eakins*. That magnificent canvas was acquired by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art through the generosity of long-time patron Cecile Bartman and her family. Not only is Cecile's generosity remarkable, but so is her wisdom and independence for realizing the importance of such a work of art. The museum's and my gratitude are immeasurable.

I would like to convey my appreciation to the American Art Council at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and to the Mr. and Mrs. Raymond J. Horowitz Foundation for the Arts for generously underwriting both this publication and the related exhibition. The council, a major support group of the museum, has a long, proud history in assisting in the growth of the institution by purchasing works for it. But this was the first time that the council underwrote both a major exhibition and publication. Mr. and Mrs. Raymond Horowitz were among the early collectors specializing in American art, and they shared their magnificent collection during their lives by lending to public exhibitions and afterward by allocating individual works to various museums. The foundation that they established guarantees that their foresight and promotion of American art will continue long after their deaths.

This publication is the creative product of many critics, authors, and scholars, deceased and alive. The texts herein are only a small sampling of the wealth of literature devoted to the artist Thomas Eakins. They serve as an excellent tribute not only to Eakins but to all the writers who have contributed to the formation and development of American studies. I would also like to thank all the estates, authors, and publishers who granted us permission to reprint this valuable material. They are credited with the individual essays, but without their assistance this anthology would not have been possible.

Before immersing myself in such an enormous project, I discussed the idea with a number of colleagues and received much encouragement. Even the heartiest "thank you" seems inadequate for all the support and advice I received from Kathleen A. Foster, the Philadelphia Museum of Art's

Robert L. McNeil Jr. Senior Curator of American Art and Director of the Center for American Art, the perfect colleague and foremost Eakins authority. She encouraged me to use the Eakins Archives at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, and the quiet time I spent there was very productive. I also received enthusiastic support and advice from Marc Simpson, E. Bruce Robertson, and Howard Fox. A big hug goes to Fox, former curator of contemporary art at LACMA, who has long been one of my most devoted supporters and has served often as my sounding board for the ideas that constantly pop into my head. My American art colleagues realized the importance and usefulness of the anthology as soon I mentioned it to them, and they all provided me with valuable suggestions about inclusions.

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This publication would not have been realized without the patient and devoted assistance of Devi Noor, curatorial administrator extraordinaire of the American art department. Devi, working with two equally wonderful volunteers to our department, Jan Gootkin and Lois Sein, took on the exhausting job of scanning, proofreading, and at times retyping article after article with enthusiasm and devotion to the cause of American art. I am indebted to them.

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ager, and Monica Paniry, editorial assistant. Cheryle T. Robertson, rights and reproductions manager, assisted by Piper Severance and freelancer Sophie Gordon, oversaw the long process of obtaining rights for reproducing the texts and illustrations. All became explorers in the new world of epubliſhing. Thank you for taking on the challenge.

This publication emerged from the exhibition *Manly Pursuits*, the first-ever examination of the master's sporting paintings and related photographs. All the various institutions with major holdings of Eakins's art were represented in this landmark exhibition. Most of these collections are also represented in this publication through the reproductions, and some also through the reprinted texts. I would like to thank the owners of Eakins's art for agreeing to be represented in this book and the related exhibition. Their generosity and the hearty support of their staffs have enabled the realization of this milestone in Eakins historiography.

Michael Govan, the museum's CEO and Wallis Annenberg Director, enthusiastically embraced the idea of this anthology and the related exhibition. I would like to thank him for supporting a new idea for a museum publication, an anthology-reader rather than an exhibition catalogue, and for his plan to place it online, thereby making it available to all. In his enthusiasm for new technology that provides easier access to art information, Michael is truly a museum director for the twenty-first century.

Last but definitely not least I would like to thank my parents, the late Irving and Bernice Goldstein, for early on instilling in me a love of history and for taking me to so many museums in and out of Philadelphia.

**ILENE SUSAN FORT**

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Chicago painter **ADAM EMORY ALBRIGHT** (1862-1957) studied under Eakins at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts (1883-86). He became known for paintings of children in landscapes.

In 1994 **MARTIN A. BERGER** had just completed his doctoral thesis in American Studies at Yale University. He is currently professor of history of art and visual culture, gender, race and representation in U.S. culture at the University of California, Santa Cruz.

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**CHARLES BREGLER** (1864-1958) studied under Eakins at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. After Eakins's death, Bregler assisted Susan Macdowell Eakins, encouraging her to save letters, diaries, sketches, and photographs. After she died in 1938, he became the unofficial caretaker of the estate, donating and selling works to many institutions. In 1985 the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts acquired from his widow the remaining Bregler collection, the largest holding of Eakins material then in private hands.



In 1996 **RICHARD R. BRETTELL** was professor of art and aesthetics at the University of Texas at Dallas. He is now their Distinguished Chair of Art and Aesthetics and serves as director of the Center for the Interdisciplinary Study of Museums and French Regional and American Museum Exchange.

Son of Bryson Burroughs, **ALAN BURROUGHS** (1897–1965) was introduced to New York art and literary circles early on. In 1926 he became a research fellow at the Fogg Art Museum, where he helped pioneer the use of x-radiography in studying art. He published a landmark book for art conservation, *Art Criticism from a Laboratory*, in 1938.

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General editor of the Philadelphia *Daily Evening Telegraph* (1868–89), critic, and painter **WILLIAM J. CLARK JR.** (1839–1889) was manager of the Philadelphia Sketch Club in 1874 when Eakins taught life drawing there. In 1876 he studied under Eakins at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts.

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The dean of Eakins Studies, **LLOYD GOODRICH** (1897–1987) wrote the first monograph on the artist. He began writing for *The Arts* in 1924 and in 1928 became its associate editor. Goodrich joined the staff of the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1930, was appointed a research curator in 1935, and served as director from 1958 to 1968.

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A historian of American art known for his writing on watercolors, **DONELSON**

**HOOPES** (1932–2006) served as curator at the Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. (where his 1964 exhibition on John Singer Sargent began the recuperation of the artist's reputation), the Brooklyn Museum, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and the M. H. de Young Memorial Museum in San Francisco.

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**SYLVESTER ROSA KOEHLER** (1837–1900) was editor and art critic for the *American Art Review* (1880–81) and honorary curator of graphic arts at the U.S. National Museum at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. In 1894 Koehler was appointed curator of the Department of Prints at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

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**PAUL LEROI** (1825–1907) was the pseudonym of Léon Gauchez, a prominent Belgian art dealer, critic, collector, and patron. He became editor of the Paris-based art magazine *L'Art* (1875–1907).

In 1920 **FRANK JEWETT MATHER JR.** (1868–1953) became editor of *Art in America* while a professor in the Department of Art and Archaeology at Princeton University, where he taught from 1910 to 1933 and directed the art museum from 1922 to 1946. He is best known for his astute art criticism and wrote for the *New York Evening Post*, *Burlington Magazine*, and the *Atlantic*

*Monthly*. In 1963 the College Art Association created the prestigious Frank Jewett Mather award for art journalism.

**FRANCIS OTTO MATTHIESSEN** (1902–1950) was a historian and literary critic who taught at Harvard (1929–50), where he served as chair of the undergraduate program in history and literature. His best-known work is the 1941 book on the American Renaissance excerpted here.

**HENRY MCBRIDE** (1867–1962) was a leading art critic who wrote for *The New York Sun* (1913–49), *The Dial* (1920–29), *Creative Art* (1928–32), and *Art News* (1950–59). He was an early champion of contemporary American artists, in particular the more progressive ones such as Georgia O’Keeffe and Charles Demuth.

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**LESLIE W. MILLER [L. W. M.]** (1848–1931) was a Philadelphia portrait painter who registered for life classes at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in 1881. He and Eakins became close friends, and Eakins painted his portrait in 1901. Miller was principal and teacher at the School of Industrial Art in Philadelphia (1880–1920).

**MITSCHKA** was the pseudonym for an unidentified turn-of-the-century writer.

American historian and literary critic **LEWIS MUMFORD** (1895–1990) is best known for his commentary on technology and urban culture. He wrote architectural criticism for *The Dial* and *The New Yorker* and published numerous books, one that has become seminal to American studies: *The Brown Decades: A Study of the Arts in America* (1931).

**BARBARA NOVAK** was a professor at Barnard College and a regular contributor to *Artforum* when her landmark book *American Painting in the Nineteenth Century: Realism, Idealism, and the American Experience* was published in 1969. She is now Helen Goodheart Altschul Professor Emerita at Barnard College. Her most recent book is *Voyages of the Self: Pairs, Parallels, and Patterns in American Art and Culture* (2007).

Painter, art critic, art adviser, and lecturer **WALTER PACH** (1883–1958) championed the cause of modern art. He published in various magazines, including *Scribner's*, and was instrumental in organizing important exhibitions of contemporary art in New York, among them the Armory Show of 1913 and the New York World's Fair art display of 1939.

A notable realist American painter, poet, and art critic, **FAIRFIELD PORTER** (1907–1975) served as editor of *Art News* and contributed to *The Nation* and *Art and Literature*. His writings were anthologized posthumously in *Fairfield Porter: Art in Its Own Terms: Selected Criticism 1935–1975* (1979).

**SIR JOHN ROTHENSTEIN** (1901–1992) is best remembered as director of the Tate Gallery (1938–64). He published *The Artists of the 1890s* (1928) and *Modern English Painters* in serial format (1952–74).

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**SYLVAN SCHENDLER** (1925–2002) was professor of English at Smith College. His book *Eakins* (1967) was a tribute to Lloyd Goodrich's earlier monograph.

Philadelphian **EARL SHINN** (1838–1886) studied painting at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts and at the École des Beaux-Arts, Paris, alongside Eakins. On the suggestion of Gérôme, he turned to writing; from 1874 to 1879 he was art editor for *The Nation*. He often wrote under the pseudonym Edward Strahan. Shinn was lifelong friend and correspondent of Eakins.

**THEODOR SIEGL** (1927–1976) was senior conservator at the Philadelphia Museum of Art (1955–76). An expert on Eakins's technique, he led the initial restoration of *The Gross Clinic*. He published extensively on Eakins, including an early catalogue of the Philadelphia Museum of Art Eakins collection. His dream of publishing Eakins's drawing manual has recently been realized.

In 1979 **CARL S. SMITH** was assistant professor of English and associate director of the program in American culture at Northwestern University. He

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**MARIANA GRISWOLD VAN RENSSELAER** (1851–1934) was the first female architectural critic and the most significant female critic in the United States during the 1880s and 1890s. She contributed to magazines and newspapers, including *American Art Review*, *American Architect and Building News*, and *New York World*.

After completing her doctoral thesis on Eakins at the University of California, Berkeley, **MARJORIE ALISON WALTER** went on to become an attorney, and currently practices at the Kipling Law Group.

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In 1987 **ROB WILSON** was professor of English at the University of Hawai'i. He is now professor of English at the University of California, Santa Cruz, and writes on the cultural poetics of America and on transnational and postcolonial literature.

# SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

## SOURCES ON THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF EAKINS

This bibliography is not intended to serve as a listing of references about Eakins's life and art. Publications by Henry Adams, Kathleen A. Foster, Lloyd Goodrich, William Innes Homer, Elizabeth Milroy, John Wilmerding, and others, amply serve this purpose and need not be duplicated. Below are listed articles, book passages, and reviews that focus solely on the historiography of Eakins; that is, they comment on the literature written about Eakins.

Adams, Henry. *Eakins Revealed: The Secret Life of an American Artist*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005. Especially pages 10–47.

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Goodrich, Lloyd. "Lloyd Goodrich Reminisces," interview by Harland Phillips. *Archives of American Art Journal* 20, no. 3 (1980): 3–18.

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Troyen, Carol. "Eakins in the Twentieth Century." In Darrel Sewell et al. *Thomas Eakins*. Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2001. Pages 367-76.

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# VARIANT TITLES OF EAKINS'S SPORTING IMAGES

## Note

G numbers stand for Lloyd Goodrich's 1933 published catalogue raisonné of Eakins's works in *Thomas Eakins: His Life and Work* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1933).

G numbers plus the letter "A" stand for the manuscript of Goodrich's updated catalogue raisonné left unpublished at the time of the compiler's death in 1987 (Lloyd and Edith Havens Goodrich, Whitney Museum of American Art, Record of Works by Thomas Eakins, Philadelphia Museum of Art).

PAFA numbers refer to the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts' publication of the Bregler collection: Kathleen A. Foster, *Thomas Eakins Rediscovered: Charles Bregler's Thomas Eakins Collection at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press for the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, 1997).

Only titles used in this book are listed here.

*Artist and His Father Hunting Reed Birds, The*, SEE *The Artist and His Father Hunting Reed-Birds on the Cohansey Marshes*

*Artist and His Father Hunting Reed-Birds on the Cohansey Marshes, The*, 1873-74 (G68) (Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, The Paul Mellon Collection)

*Artist and His Father Shooting Reed-Birds, The*, SEE *The Artist and His Father Hunting Reed-Birds on the Cohansey Marshes*

*Ball Players Practicing*, SEE *Baseball Players Practicing*

*Baseball*, SEE *Baseball Players Practicing*

*Baseball Players Practicing*, watercolor, 1875 (G86) (Rhode Island School of Design, Providence)

*Baseball Players Practicing: Perspective Study*, c. 1874-75 (Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia; PAFA 172)

*Baseball Players Practicing: Perspective Study with Figures*, c. 1874-75 (PAFA 173) (Pennsylvania Academy)

*Bathing Pool*, SEE *Swimming*

*Between Rounds*, 1899 (G312) (Philadelphia Museum of Art)

*Biglin Brothers Practicing, The*, SEE *The Pair-Oared Shell*

*Biglin Brothers Racing, The*, 1872 (G61) (National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.)

*Biglin Brothers Rowing, The*, SEE *The Biglin Brothers Racing*

*Biglin Brothers Turning a Stake-Boat, The*, SEE *The Biglin Brothers Turning the Stake*

*Biglin Brothers Turning the Stake, The*, 1873 (G52) (Cleveland Museum of Art)

*Billy Smith (study)*, 1898 (G315) (Wichita Art Museum, Kansas)

*Billy Smith Between Rounds*, SEE *Billy Smith (study)*

*Billy Smith Between Rounds*, SEE *Between Rounds*

*Champion Single Sculls, The (Max Schmitt in a Single Scull)*, 1871 (G44) (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City)

*Champion Sculls, The*, SEE *The Champion Single Sculls (Max Schmitt in a Single Scull)*

*chasse aux États-Unis, Une* (1875 Paris Salon), SEE *A Hunt in the United States*

*Counting Out*, SEE *Taking the Count*

*Drifting*, 1875 (G83) (Wilmerding Collection, National Gallery of Art)

*Fairman Rogers Four-in-Hand, The*, SEE *A May Morning in the Park (The Fairman Rogers Four-in-Hand)*

*Harry Young, of Moyamensing, and Sam Helhower, "The Pusher," Going Rail Shooting* (watercolor), SEE *Starting Out after Rail*, watercolor

*Hunt in the United States, A (Une chasse aux États-Unis)*, perhaps *Pushing for Rail* (G70) or *Whistling for Plover* (G72), SEE entry for each

*Hunting (a sketch)*, c. 1874 (G73) (collection of Jamie Wyeth)

*John Biglin in a Single Scull*, watercolor, 1873 (G57) (Metropolitan Museum of Art)

*John Biglin in a Single Scull*, watercolor, 1874 (G56 or 60) (Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, CT)

*John Biglin in a Single Scull*, oil, 1874 (G59) (Yale University Art Gallery)

*Max Schmidt in a Single Scull*, SEE *The Champion Single Sculls (Max Schmitt in a Single Scull)*

*May Morning*, SEE *A May Morning in the Park (The Fairman Rogers Four-in-Hand)*

*May Morning in the Park, A (The Fairman Rogers Four-in-Hand)*, 1879-80 (G133) (Philadelphia Museum of Art)

*Oarsmen (study), The*, 1873 (G65) (Portland Art Museum, Oregon)

*Oarsmen, The*, c. 1874, SEE *The Schreiber Brothers*

*Oarsmen on the Schuylkill*, c. 1874 (G63) (private collection)

*Pair-Oared Shell, The*, 1872 (G49) (Philadelphia Museum of Art)

*Perspective Drawing for "The Pair-Oared Shell,"* pencil, ink, and wash, c. 1872 (G50) (Philadelphia Museum of Art)

*Perspective Drawing for "The Pair-Oared Shell,"* pencil, ink, and watercolor, 1872 (G51) (Philadelphia Museum of Art)

*Perspective Drawing for "The Biglin Brothers Racing,"* 1872 (G62) (Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.)

*Perspective Drawing for "The Biglin Brothers Turning the Stake,"* c. 1873 (G53) (Hirshhorn Museum)

*Perspective Drawing for The Biglin Brothers Turning the Stake,* c. 1873 (G52A) (Cleveland Museum of Art) (smaller drawing)

*Perspective Studies for John Biglin in a Single Scull,* c. 1873 (G58) (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston)

*Perspective Study of Baseball Players,* c. 1874-75 (G86A) (Hirshhorn Museum)

*Plan and Cross-Section for Oarsmen on the Schuylkill,* c. 1874 (PAFA 149) (Pennsylvania Academy)

*Perspective and Plan for The Schreiber Brothers,* 1874 (PAFA 147) (Pennsylvania Academy)

*Poleman in the Ma'sh, The,* c. 1881 (G151) (National Gallery of Art)

*Pusher, A,* SEE *The Poleman in the Ma'sh*

*Pushing for Rail,* 1874 (G70) (Metropolitan Museum of Art); possibly 1875 Paris Salon work

*Rail Shooting,* SEE *Rail Shooting from a Punt*

*Rail Shooting from a Punt,* brush and black wash, c. 1874 (G150) (Yale University Art Gallery)

*Rail Shooting on the Delaware,* drawing, 1876 (G104A) (collection of Mr. and Mrs. Daniel W. Dietrich II)

*Rail Shooting on the Delaware,* oil, 1876 (G104) (Yale University Art Gallery)

*Rower, The,* watercolor, c. 1873 (G55); may be *John Biglin in a Single Scull,* watercolor, 1873 (G57)

*Sailboats Racing on the Delaware,* 1874 (G76) (Philadelphia Museum of Art)

*Salutat,* 1898 (G310) (Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, Andover, MA)

*Schreiber Brothers, The,* 1874 (G66) (Yale University Art Gallery)

*Sketch of Max Schmitt in a Single Scull,* 1870-71 (G64) (Philadelphia Museum of Art)

*Spring Morning in the Park,* SEE *A May Morning in the Park* (*The Fairman Rogers Four-in-Hand*)

*Starting Out after Rail,* watercolor, 1874 (G79) (Wichita Art Museum)

*Starting Out after Rail*, oil, c. 1874 (G78) (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston)  
*Swimming*, 1884-85 (G190) (Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth, Texas)  
*Swimming Hole, The*, SEE *Swimming*  
*Swimming Pool, The*, SEE *Swimming*  
*Taking the Count*, 1898 (G303) (Yale University Art Gallery)  
*Turning the Stake*, SEE *The Biglin Brothers Turning the Stake*  
*Turning the Stake, A Pair-Oared Race*, SEE *The Biglin Brothers Turning the Stake*  
*Whistling for Plover*, 1874 (G71) (Brooklyn Museum, New York City)  
*Whistling for Plover*, c. 1874 (G72); possibly 1875 Salon work (location unknown)  
*Will Schuster and Blackman Going Shooting*, SEE *Rail Shooting on the Delaware*, oil  
*Will Schuster and Blackman Going Shooting for Rail*, SEE *Rail Shooting on the Delaware*, oil  
*Wrestlers*, c. 1899, photograph (Hirshhorn Museum)  
*Wrestlers*, 1899, oil (G317) (Los Angeles County Museum of Art)  
*Wrestlers*, 1899, oil (G319) (Philadelphia Museum of Art)

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*Manly Pursuits: Writings on the Sporting Images of Thomas Eakins* is the first anthology of its kind. The source material herein, carefully culled from journals, contemporary newspaper accounts, and monographs, constitutes an ambitious and comprehensive examination of the sporting theme in Eakins's work—paintings, nude studies, and motion photographs—across more than 125 years. Along the way it reveals the development of critical thought on Eakins from nineteenth-century exhibition reviews to contemporary queer theory. Through this focus these fifty-seven chronological selections—beginning with a letter from the artist to his father—take the reader on a journey that follows the development of American art, culture, literature, and society through most of its history.

Ilene Susan Fort, who chose, edited, and introduced the selections in this volume, is Gail and John Liebes Curator of American Art at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.